ALBERTA WILDFIRES : CUT THE DAMAGE, NOT THE BUDGET

I – The AB Wildfire Problem

Experts agree that the average area burned in Canada by wildfires has doubled since 1970, and that this trend is likely to continue. The massive AB wildfires starting early May 2023, creating air quality index readings of 10+ in Edmonton – the highest on the planet – would seem enough to ask why so much smoke was seen so early in the spring. At least part of the answer comes from the size of some of these fires. Why is it that some of these fires were so large?

As of August 31, 2023 about $1B (75% of the GOA Emergency Budget) had been spent on wildfires. The extent of wildfire damage is yet to be finalized for Alberta 2023, but is predictable on a range of measures. Early data alone would seem enough for most to ask if Alberta firefighting systems couldn't have done a lot more to reduce wildfire damage.

1) https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/canada-wildfire-data-change-1.6854186

2) https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-wildfires-smoke-returns-air-quality-expected-to-reach-high-risk

*** Forest Burn Area –** Between May 4-7, 100+ wildfires had started, with 31 out-of-control. By May 19, there were already 493 wildfires burning nearly 830,000 hectares (592,000 football fields). On June 27, Alberta Wildfire reported 83 active wildfires -10 out-of-control – for a total 620,000 hectares (442, 680 football fields) still burning. While the rain helped douse fires west of Edmonton (Pembina Complex), well over 200K hectares were burned in those fires alone.

3) https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/unprecedented-start-to-wildfire-season-1.6861945

4) https://srd.web.alberta.ca/edson-area-update/2023-06-14-1000am

* **Property Damage** – The 2016 Ft. MacMurray fire is reported as the costliest natural disaster in Canadian history at a total cost estimated at $8.5B (" FireStorm", 2017, Struzik, Ed). For 2023, data is not final, though by May 19, an estimated 275 structures had been damaged (Alberta Emergency Management Agency). With power outages, a significant amount of goods damage e.g. Food spoilage, had also been reported.

5) https://www.canadianunderwriter.ca/brokers/what-claims-may-come-from-the-alberta-wildfires-1004233606/

6)https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-wildfires-smoke-returns-air-quality-expected-to-reach-high-risk

*** Health Costs**– Current data on measured health impacts of 2023 wildfires on Albertans are also TBA. However, multiple health studies have linked wildfire smoke to serious health consequences including heart attacks, strokes and breathing problems, as well as cancer rates and mental health issues. Pollutants such as sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds, fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)

and ozone can be responsible. It is the fine particles not visible to the human eye, that get deep into our lungs and bloodstream, which pose the main health risk from wildfire smoke. There's no evidence of a safe level of exposure to some of these pollutants.

High air quality health index readings continue through summer 2023 in Alberta. On June 12, 2023, Environment Canada issued a Special Air Quality Statement for most of Alberta. In late July, readings of 11 were registered. What will it take for us to get more serious about reducing these health risks?

7) AB Health - https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/wildfire-smoke-health.aspx#:~:text=%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8B,respiratory)%20system%2C%20and%20bloodstream

8) Environment Canada https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/wildfire-smoke.html

9) https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whitecoat/the-dose-wildfire-smoke-1.6860689

Displacement/Disruption/Evacuations - From May 4-7, 2023, about 30,000 Albertans were evacuated. For the Pembina/Edson Complex Fire alone, some 8000 Edson and 3000 nearby rural citizens were evacuated. Suffice it to say that these evacuations have been very costly to many citizens in terms of lost work time and other disruptions.

10) CTV - https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-wildfire-season-2023-how-does-it-compare-1.6391711

11) Wildfire Today - https://wildfiretoday.com/2023/05/05/alberta-fires-evacuate-thousands/

12) https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/get-out-now-officials-urge-people-in-yellowhead-county-evacuation-zone-to-leave-as-fire-tears-through-the-county-1.6436050

*** Impacts on 1st Nations –** Disproportionate impacts on 1st Nations peoples should be obvious given their highly forested locations in northern Alberta, where some of the largest fires have occurred in 2023. These impacts are well-documented :

a) Area of burn on traditional lands e.g. Almost 1/3 of Pembina/Edson Complex fires were on the O'Chiese Reserve; b) Property damage e.g. Sturgeon Lake Cree/East Prairie Metis Settlement – 29 homes lost, often uninsured due to low incomes; c) Evacuations – 1/3 of all Canadian wildfire evacuees since 1950 have been 1st Nations; evacuations have occurred from four Alberta 1st Nations and one Metis Settlement e.g. Sturgeon Lake Cree (17,000).

Along with these fires and evacuations have come a range of issues for 1st Nations including : Injury to local firefighters; school absenteeism; power disruption causing loss of traditional stored foods; increased health risks to vulnerable people (diseased lungs and hearts, elders); displacement from traditional hunting and fishing culture; rekindling of residential school/colonial experiences; racism in communities receiving evacuees; extensive local costs to contain fires until provincial crews arrive in remote locations.

13)
https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/gov-t-disregard-of-indigenous-prescribed-cultural-burns-created-this-catastrophe-advocates-1.5525057
a) Chat Line - You Tube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEogpOSF3hA
b) APTN , Paradis, D. https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/sturgeon-lake-cree-nation-wildfire/
c) CBC, Smith S.
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/indigenous-communities-in-alberta-coping-with-emotional-roller-coaster-of-wildfires-1.6841846
d) AB Native News
https://www.albertanativenews.com/alberta-wildfires-continue-impact-on-indigenous-communities/
e) CTV
https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/we-re-going-to-rebuild-indigenous-communities-look-to-recover-from-devastating-wildfires-1.6420027
f) AB Primetimes -
https://www.albertaprimetimes.com/beyond-local/wildfires-are-threatening-first-nations-and-metis-communities-in-alberta-6990783

* **Economic Impacts** – In Alberta in June 2023, 2400 firefighters were active including 800 USA, 225 Australia and NZ; 215 S. Africa. For the Pembina/Edson Complex Fires alone, 249 firefighters, 65 support staff, 72 heavy equipment, 22 helicopters, and 88 structure protectors were deployed. A range of other economic/social costs of wildfires have also been documented such as increased crime (see R6.), and reduced industrial production. These costs to Albertans are TBA for 2023, but needless to say, they will be substantial.

Sadly, the economic costs of Canadian wildfires have risen $150 million per decade1970 (NRCan). Also sadly, most public dollars are paying for post-fire damage – not for better prevention and suppression. In fact, wildfires are seen by some as an economic benefit. Forest fires show up as an increase in GDP, as governments spend money on helicopters, water bombers, imported firefighters and victim compensation.

15)https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-alberta-wildfires-emergency-preparedness-funding/
16) https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/fires-climate-accounting-column-don-pittis-1.6846066
Alberta Costs
17)https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-alberta-wildfires-emergency-preparedness-funding/
Evacuations and Emergency
18) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-wildfire-evacuation-emergency-1.6835794

* **Wildlife and Ecology** – Obviously, wildlife in burn areas is extensively displaced, injured or killed. Experts say that wildfires benefit some species e.g. New grass for ungulates, berries for bears, easy rodent and insect meals for raptors and woodpeckers and better nesting opportunities. However, while faster critters like ungulates and bears can also escape fires, slow moving turtles and porcupines suffer from burns and the toxic, oxygen-deprived chemicals of fire smoke. Wildfire contaminants also affect entire nearby aquatic ecosystems. Phosphorous enhances plant growth, drawing in more insects and invasive fish species. These impacts have been long lasting.

19) CBC
https://www.cbc.ca/radio/quirks/aug-25th-2018-an-ancient-human-hybrid-child-universal-blood-parasites-parasitize-each-other-and-more-1.4795953/what-are-the-impacts-of-forest-fires-on-wildlife-1.4795972

20) CTV -
https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/how-wildfires-impact-wildlife-their-habitat-1.5635592

Researchers also note that habitat disturbance can lower survival rates of some species for decades e.g. Old growth dependent species like the spotted owl in BC, or sage grouse on the prairies.

21) https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/what-happens-to-wildlife-during-a-wildfire

Still others note that some animals do die from flames (mostly the elderly and young), but that most mortalities come after the fire is out, due to lost habitat and food sources. New habitat created usually supports new grasses and shrubs and also opportunity for invasive species to move in before native species get the chance. During a wildfire many animals will find ways to escape, either by travel, or by burrowing underground. However the strategy of burrowing underground fails when the intensity of the fire is too great.

22) https://spca.bc.ca/news/how-wildfires-affect-wildlife/

* **Soil and H2O** – Soil/surface changes following wildfire lead to eroded soils, enhanced runoff, and flooding and contamination of freshwater with carbon, sediment and firefighting chemicals. Forest soils normally absorb and evenly distribute precipitation or melting snow, as well as filtering sediment and toxins. As well, more water runs off earlier meaning less available during dry periods.

23) CTV
https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/severe-wildfires-could-affect-community-watersheds-says-forest-service-researcher-1.5530481

Water treatment - The issue is mostly the strain on infrastructure and supply posed by wildfire contaminants. Cyanobacteria, for example, can clog water treatment systems and limit their ability to supply enough potable water. The cost of providing clean drinking water to Fort McMurray after the 2016 wildfire spiked 50 percent.

24) CBC
https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/how-wildfires-can-have-a-devastating-long-term-impact-on-nearby-water-supplies-1.6880416

Water Quality and Quantity - Wildfires can cause changes in a nutrients, sulfate, pH, total dissolved solids, turbidity, organic carbon, chloride, iron, color, taste, and odor. Water quantity impacts include increased flooding and peak flows as well as debris flows. Wildfires can have severe and lasting impacts on aquatic ecosystems, particularly following post fire rainfall events, due to sediments, nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus) and metals (lead). Studies post 2016 Ft. MacMurray rivers were 1.2–10 times greater concentrations than rivers draining unburned regions. Sediment concentrations in impacted rivers were often larger by 95%.

25) https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0043135420306084

Specific Wildfire Impacts on Natural and Human Systems

Ash and PAHs - Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), along with ash and other organic materials, travel by air until they settle on the land and in water. Ash and high temperatures are among the largest impacts on local ecosystems.

Fire Retardant - Fire retardant, including ammonia, phosphorus, and cyanide, impact fish and aquatic life. These chemicals were also found in similar concentrations to streams in burned areas where retardant was not used.

Clouds and Weather - If the heat of a fire is lifted high enough it can create a water cycle of its own through pyro-cumulus clouds. These clouds may rise above the smoke from a major wildfire, and rain can fall, which can cause lightning that creates other fires in the same or neighbouring watershed.

Reduced Trees and Plants - Following a wildfire the number of trees and plants in the impacted area can be dramatically reduced. With decreased canopy results in more snow "pillows" on the ground, higher peak flows in the spring, and mudslides floods, and debris into streams. Decreased trees and plants means there are fewer opportunities for precipitation to be trapped and soaked into the ground, meaning higher surface runoff, increased erosion, and decreased water quality. Runoff during the first year after a wildfire can increase by as much as 30%.

Flooding and Mudslides - Intense rainfall after a wildfire can be exacerbated by debris flows with large amounts of soil, rocks, and trees from a burned area. The more rugged/steeper a watershed is, the more susceptible it is to debris flows after a wildfire.

Land stability and hydrophobicity - Fewer trees and plants means fewer roots holding together the soil and increased potential for mudslides. Slow-moving fires create a gas that penetrates the soil profile. As the soil cools, this gas condenses and forms a waxy coating. This causes the soil to repel water and exacerbate runoff impacts.

Sediment, erosion and aquatic life - If rainfall occurs after a wildfire, the ash and soot that fell during the fire will be flushed through the watershed. Sediment can affect stream structure and function; headwater reaches will undergo erosion and can become unstable, while flatter downstream reaches will receive sediment and may become clogged with fine material. Sediment after the fire can overwhelm fish and aquatic habits. Since the 2003 Lost Creek fire in Alberta some of the aquatic ecology still has not recovered [19].

Water treatment plants and reservoirs - A consideration for water treatment plants after a wildfire is turbidity, or cloudiness. Increased turbidity may require more treatment chemicals or cause additional wear of water treatment filters. Filtration membranes may need more frequent backwashes, which uses more water and increases 'downtime'. Sediment and debris flows may disrupt reservoirs and curtailing their useful life.

Recreation - Areas may be closed for some time due to risks of falling trees and limbs. Vegetation that shades cold-water streams and keeps them cool is lost. Favored angling species such as trout, require a steady supply of clean, cold and silt-free water.

26) https://albertawater.com/how-wildfires-impact-a-watershed/

Wildfires and Global Warming

Aside from the many local impacts, wildfires contribute heavily to accelerated warming of our planet, due mainly to carbon emissions from burnt vegetation and built structures. The European Union's Copernicus Atmosphere

Monitoring Service reported on August 3 that total carbon emissions from wildfires across Canada in 2023 already more than double the previous record (2014) and represent over 25 per cent of the global total for 2023 to date.

Forests act as a critical sink for planet-warming carbon, and Canada's northern boreal forest stores the equivalent to several decades worth of global carbon emissions. But when forests burn, they release some of that carbon into the atmosphere, speeding up global warming and conditions where forests are more likely to burn.

Given this negative feedback loop of wildfires, it would seem prudent to do all we absolutely can to minimize the size of wildfires and the carbon they are sending into an already overheated planet.

https://www.mapleridgenews.com/news/b-c-wildfires-contribute-to-record-smashing-greenhouse-gas-emissions/
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/27/canada-wildfires-released-record-breaking-carbon
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/03/canada-wildfire-smoke-record-pollution
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/wildfires-climate-change-carbon-88-1.6852178
https://atmosphere.copernicus.eu/copernicus-emissions-canadian-wildfires-highest-record-smoke-plume-reaches-europe

Wildfire History and Projections

Canadian Data – Scientists warn that record fire seasons are going to be commonplace. Since 1970, the average burn area in Canada has doubled. Eight of Canada's worst fire seasons have taken place in the past decade, with three of Western Canada's worst seasons occurring in the past five years. From 2010-2019, three times as many fires have occurred than in the three decades prior. Earlier spring thaws, drier vegetation and more lightning strikes are some of many factors likely to ensure these trends continue into the future.

27) https://www.cbc.ca/news/climate/canada-wildfire-data-change-1.6854186

28) https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/unprecedented-start-to-wildfire-season-1.6861945

Alberta Data - As of May 9, 2023 wildfires in Alberta had already been described as "unprecedented", depending on the variable looked at. For examples, the numbers of evacuations, property damage, states of local emergency, area burned and number of fires out of control were already very high : 1) # of fires - 416 wildfires, more than double the 182 registered by the same time last year and a greater number than any of the last five years; 2) Area burned, 2019 showed a slightly higher area by mid (621K vs 410K), the total burn may yet exceed the 2019 total of 883K hectares. Recent data comparing 2023 and the previous decade may be interpreted to mean that 2023 is no cause for alarm. However, if we examine the record over the last 50 years, the trend is clear that and that we may well have seen only the beginning of what will come.

28. https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-wildfire-season-2023-how-does-it-compare-1.6391711

II – Roots of the AB Wildfire Problem

Climate change, El Nino, arson, and lightning continue to be used as explanations of an early and unprecedented wildfire season. These are all legitimate, but solutions will all be long-term. The immediate and pressing question here is not about final causes, but rather, how can we minimize the damage?

Alberta fire prevention and suppression have been recognized as world class. GOA websites identify the extensive firefighting infrastructure that is in place. But scientists and fire suppression experts have long predicted that the accelerating frequency and extent of wildfires will require a seriously modified approach. For 2023 in Alberta, resting on our laurels is clearly inadequate. Serious budget and program cuts to Alberta provincial wildfire programs are beyond doubt significant in the very large wildfires seen in Alberta in 2023.

* **GOA Wildfire Cuts** – In 2016, the newly elected NDP GOA cut $15M from the AB wildfire budget between major wildfire seasons in 2015 and 2017 (1million hectares burned). The rationale was that an Emergency Budget would cover wildfire needs.

Since their 2019 re-election, the UCP Alberta Government has quietly cut about $30M from $130M for wildfire control and suppression, including the 63 member helicopter "RapAttack" Wildland Firefighter Rappel Program, effective in dousing wildfires while still small. Personnel cuts in many areas have reduced experienced wildfire fighting personnel by 50%, as they seek more adequate work than is offered by an arbitrarily shortened UCP wildfire season. The same budget has also cut about 20% of the province's 127 wildfire lookout towers. Is it conceivable these cuts to AB wildfire resources have been anything but significant in – if not responsible for - the unprecedented growth and size of Alberta's 2023 wildfires?

**29)https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/a-history-of-cuts-to-alberta-s-firefighting-budget-explained-1.6838994

30) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-wildfires-rapattack-aerial-teams-1.6838626

31)https://www.dailyheraldtribune.com/opinion/letters/wednesday-letters-ucp-will-repeat-cuts-to-alberta-fire-services-when-smoke-clears

* **Opposition to GOA Cuts** - Many experienced AB firefighting personnel and other experts claim consistently that GOA cuts have gutted the ability of existing Alberta systems to manage fires effectively. Beside the loss of the "RapAttack" program, cuts have resulted in reduced aerial and other monitoring as well as inadequate aerial water tanker capacity. Forest rangers and wildfire information officers must now manage multiple districts. Seasonal availability of firefighters, radio dispatch and other personnel are shortened – even as wildfire season length is also increasing. There has been an exodus of experienced personnel - estimated at 60% turnover in 2023.

Many have spoken out on these cuts, some anonymously, for fear of losing their jobs :

* The Alberta Fire Chiefs Association have long warned against cuts to Volunteer Firefighter programs;

* Experienced Fire Crew Leaders state that "We don't have enough resources, period" e.g. Air tankers and structure protection crews, to manage increasingly larger areas.

32) https://thenarwhal.ca/alberta-wildfire-ucp-cuts/

33) https://www.projectcalgary.org/ucp_gutted_firefighter_programs

* Researchers confirm the high efficacy of programs like RapAttack, and have identified factors consistent in

inadequate GOA responses to large wildfires e.g. Fort MacMurray 2016, including poor coordination, lack of leadership and communication, and ignoring of 1st Nations traditional burn practices. Mike Flanagan, established wildfire expert, notes significant weakness in our fire intelligence and fire forecasting based on reliable temperature and other conditions provided by resources such as Environment Canada.
* Fire lookout personnel report that aerial patrols are less frequent and that fires burn several hours before firefighters arrive, so that community awareness of new fires is seriously reduced. Dry lightning occurs where towers are closed. "We all knew this was going to happen", they say.
* Directly affected municipal officials such as a Fox Creek Mayor, a Nordegg Fire Response Director and a Crowsnest Pass Mayor and Council have all opposed the 2019 loss of the RapAttack program and other wildfire infrastructure. It is interesting that the UCP removal of RapAttack included Edson, Fox Creek and Lac La Biche – regions with large burns in 2023.

34) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-wildfires-rapattack-aerial-teams-1.6838626

* Alberta Political Parties – They claim that programs such as RapAttack are vital to prevent the spread of wildfires. As well, they claim and that beyond a restoration of cuts, a range of other measures are needed to slow AB wildfire growth such as larger water bombers, and modified forestry practices such as reduction of slash/waste and the use of toxic herbicides like glyphosate.

35) https://www.greenpartyofalberta.ca/reinstate_rap

36) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-wildfires-rapattack-aerial-teams-1.6838626

Industry and Wildfires

Most experts agree that the production and burning of fossil fuels are by far the largest contributors to climate change and the worsening wildfire situation, but can the fossil fuel industry be held to account for this? This question is increasingly being addressed by *attribution science,* which attempts to measure how climate change directly affects extreme weather events. A recent study found that 37 per cent of the total burned forest in Western Canada from 1986-2021 can be traced back to 88 major fossil fuel producers and cement manufacturers.

Legal action is now being taken against industry on their role in climate change driving events such as wildfires. However, answers to how else we can hold industry to account for both the prevention and damage of wildfires is the subject of another report. For this report, suffice it to say that government regulation could play a critical role.

37) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/wildfires-climate-change-carbon-88-1.6852178

III – How can Alberta be more prepared to minimize wildfire damage?

How is it that in a province as wealthy as Alberta, with an $11B government surplus in 2023, wildfire damage is at such disaster proportions? How, following the 2016 Ft. MacMurray and 2011 Slave Lake fires, do AB wildfires continue as they have in 2023?

*** GOA Claims and Promises** - In 2023, the UCP has continued to downplay criticism of their 2019 wildfire

budget cuts. An Alberta Forestry, Parks and Tourism representative stated that the UCP Government is "committed to doing everything we can to fight these fires, and keep Albertans and their property and homes safe". Meanwhile, a GOA website links such as Alberta Wildfire's "How we fight wildfires?" outlines the extensive provincial resources available to prevent, detect and extinguish wildfires. Further, a major 2012 report following the massive 2011 Slave Lake wildfire by the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development's "Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review" Committee assessed Alberta's wildfire response to the wildfires. The GOA committee claimed that they have *fully met the intent* of all 21 recommendations,

* **Refuting the UCP RapAttack Removal** - In 2019, UCP Minister of Forestry claimed that the 63 member RapAttack program was cut as an inefficient use of GOA funds. The Minister claimed that RapAttack personnel spent only 2% of their time rapelling, and the rest on the ground. A subsequent FOIP revealed that this UCP claim was at best, misleading. The FOIP showed that from 2014-18 : a) The RapAttack program received an average of 100 calls per year, with 23% requiring rapelling; b) The UCP claim of a $23M saving was shown to be only $1.4M. A subsequent GOA report also contributed data to the importance of early and rapid response to fires – offered by RapAttack.

In 2019, the government commissioned a review of prevention and response strategies between 2011-2019 that repeatedly mentions the critical importance of an early response to wildfires. **The report finds that if crews arrived at fires faster, they were significantly more likely to contain the fire by the following day. Suppression costs also increased dramatically if initial containment succeeded, with total savings in land value and fire suppression costs at more than $5B.**

Experienced RapAttack members such as Jordan Erlandson contend that RapAttack is the fastest and safest way to get into thick bush, muskeg, and other areas less accessible by heavy. Many of the large burn areas for 2023 were in this type of terrain. Considering this, how many small fires could have been extinguished quickly in 2023 with the RapAttack and other firefighting resources eliminated by the AB UCP government?

36.
https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/alberta/article-firefighters-question-ucp-budget-cuts-to-aerial-attack-teams-as/

* Conclusions

Just after her 2023 election, UCP Premier Danielle Smith stated that: "The Province's firefighting capacity will be examined". But with the unprecedented damage already done, and Smith's uninformed comments that "arsonists" are to blame, one would have to doubt the seriousness of this promise, and of the validity of any of the above UCP claims. It will be difficult to prove conclusively that restored AB wildfire resources could have slowed or stopped fires before in 2023. However, enough evidence in statements made by experienced wildfire professionals and researchers suggest strongly that it would.

37) https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-wildfires-rapattack-aerial-teams-1.6838626

Action on Alberta Wildfires

Most experts agree that more and larger wildfires will be the “norm” as global warming accelerates. A number of citizen-based actions are proposed here in conjunction with the Council of Canadians Edmonton and other supporting organizations e.g. Expert town halls, demonstrations and petitions. Below are the beginnings of a petition targeting the Alberta Government and its cuts to wildfire prevention and suppression. Supporting and informed individuals and organizations will be approached to support this and other actions towards the 2024 AB fire season.

SAMPLE PETITION ON WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT

Given extensive and informed opposition to GOA historical and ongoing cuts to AB Wildfire budgets, we at the Council of Canadians, along with citizens and organizations who have signed this petition, call on the GOA to take immediate action as follows :

* Increase the amount and accuracy of wildfire intelligence, forecasting and monitoring
* Reinstate the Alberta Helicopter Rapelling “RapAttack” program
* Restore and expand lookout positions
* Add more and larger aerial water tankers
* Restore funding for rural firefighters, and add resources for new tools and equipment.
* Stop spraying glyphosate to kill fire-resistant aspen trees.
* Re-visit prescribed burning practices utilized by indigenous peoples.
* Amend forest harvesting practices that generate high waste and fuel for wildfires.

Contact :
Richard Merry, Council of Canadians Edmonton Chapter
edmontoncouncil@yahoo.ca or gceaenv@shaw.ca

Additional References

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-alberta-had-one-of-the-best-wildfire-programs-in-the-world-budget-cuts/
https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/alberta-wildfire-early-summer-outlook - Fires 10x in size due to climate change, dry conditions and longer fire seasons.