

Alberta Wildfire Season Overview 2023

Mike Kingsbury – Wildfire Prevention Officer Grande Prairie Forest Area

MPWA

Fire and Water Forum

February 28, 2024

TARA Center Grande Prairie, Alberta



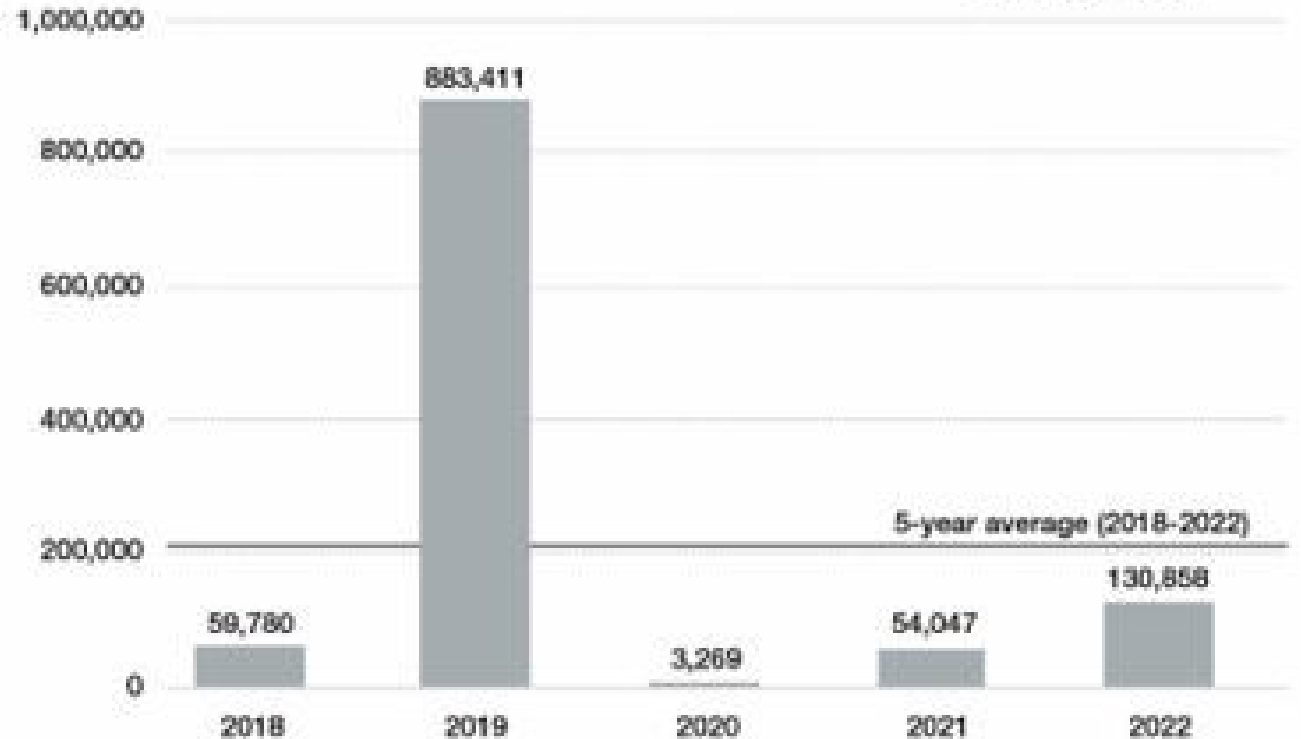
2023 Fire Season Overview Area Burned

- Largest area burned on record.
- Next highest year was 1981 at 1, 357, 306 ha.

Hectares burned

Hectares burned


2,211,900
2023 Season

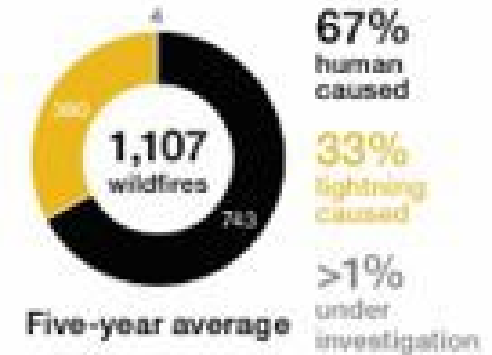
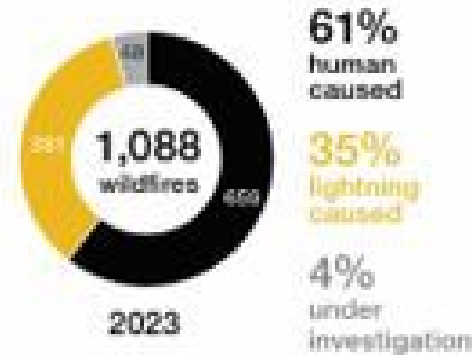


Wildfire Cause 2023

- Humans still cause 61% of all wildfires.
- These are all preventable.

Wildfire causes

1,088 wildfires



Top wildfire causes



* A wildfire that has been intentionally lit, which includes but is not limited to arson.

Lightning

Lightning caused wildfires



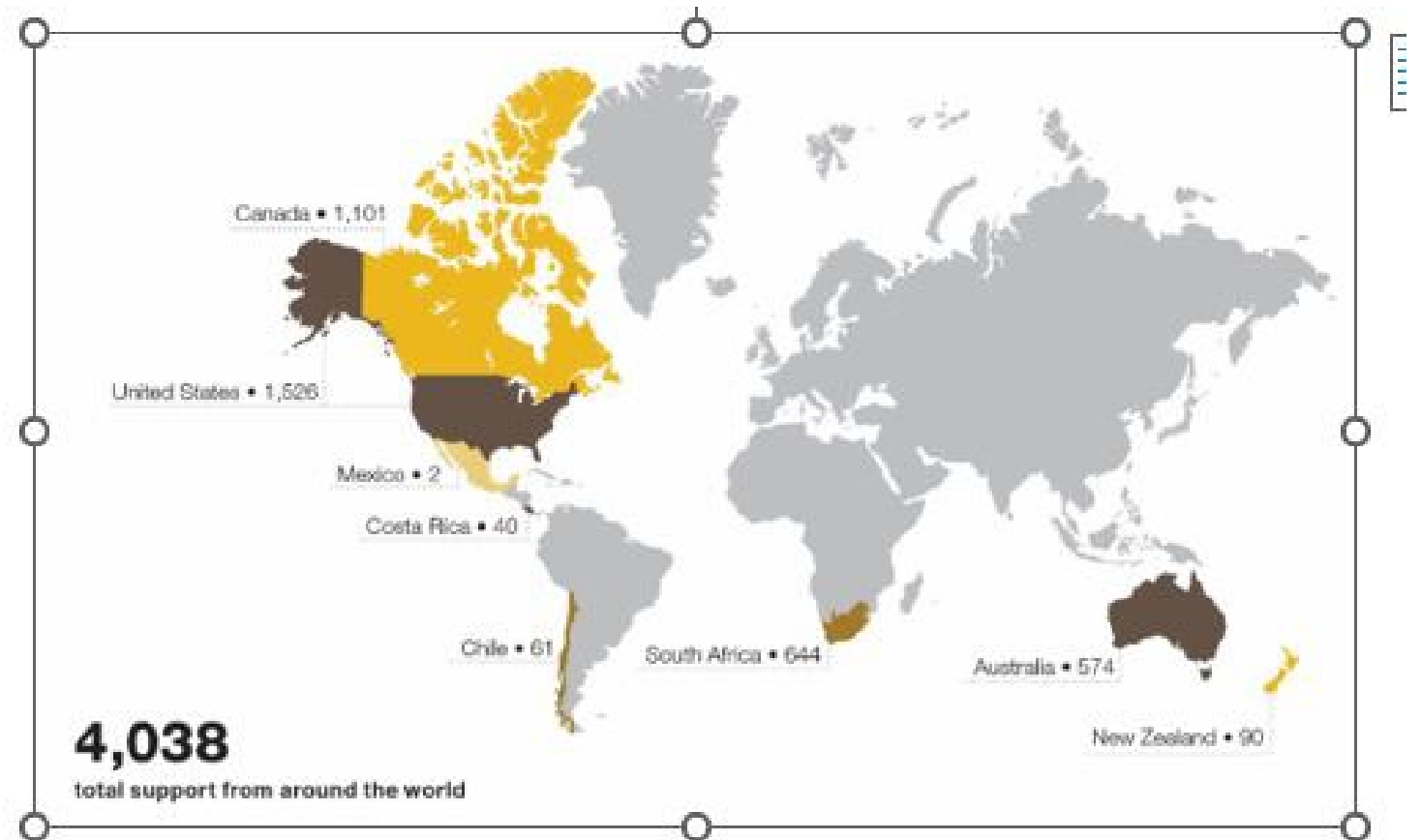
1,750,867 hectares

169,556 hectares
5-year average (2018-2022)

- Lightning did account for 35% of the wildfires in 2023
- Lightning accounted for almost 80% of the area burned in 2023.

Fire Fighters Imported in 2023

- 4 000 fire fighters were needed in 2023.
- They came from all over the world.



May 5th, 2023

- Fire season is unpredictable, but the preparedness approach each season is the same.



Wildfire Safety

- Given the unpredictability of wildfires - **safety** is the number one priority.
- Fire Fighting is very dangerous.
- In Canada, 8 people lost their lives in 2023 fighting wildfires.



Wildfire Preparedness

- The legislative Fire Season in Alberta in the Forest Protection Area (pink area) is March 1 - October 31.
- Municipalities are responsible for Forest Protection in the Non-Forest Protection Area (white area).
- The Alberta Government has Mutual-Aid Fire Control Agreements with the municipalities.





Fire Danger

- Fire Danger in the spring presents the greatest wildfire challenges.
- Dry dead grass, strong winds and low humidity combine to create fire that spreads rapidly.
- Getting enough resources in place takes time and effort. Early fire danger can further complicate the situation.

Wildfire Apps

- The wildfire app and the Alberta fire bans app downloaded onto your mobile device really help to stay current with the escalating spring fire danger.



May 05, 2023 at 15:47:36 MDT

47°53'N / 119°0.7301'W ($\pm 4.7\text{m}$)

($\pm 3.5\text{m}$)

Mag: 274° N86W 4871mils True ($\pm 10^\circ$)

-02.2°

01.1°

PH02 Leader

Fire Danger

- During El Nino conditions western Canada experiences warm dry winters with little to no snow.
- This was the case starting in the Fall of 2022 which led to very elevated drought conditions to end the 2022 season.
- The dry fall and lack of overwinter precipitation then created the conditions for extreme fire behavior in May of 2023.
- Early spring dry lightning then caused multiple fire starts in a very short period overwhelming response efforts.



Wildfire Preparedness

- Alberta Wildfire monitors the over winter precipitation to help predict the timing and severity of the upcoming fire season.
- Based on that prediction Alberta Wildfire, municipalities and Industry can start to prepare accordingly.
- This winter is an exceptionally strong El Nino so in response Alberta Wildfire is starting earlier than normal, bringing on additional resources and partnering with Industry and municipalities in anticipation of what could be another very challenging fire season.



Wildfire Preparedness

- Grande Prairie Forest Area Wildfire Resources:
- 10 lookouts
- GP Air Tanker Base
- 2 Fire Bases (Graham and Valleyview)
- 40 seasonal fire fighters
- 16 contract fire fighters (Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation)
- 12 seasonal wildfire support staff - dispatchers, logistics, warehouse, patrol persons and data entry.
- Provincial air tanker fleet
- Numerous helicopter contracts
- Numerous heavy equipment contracts

Wildfire Preparedness

- Grande Prairie Forest Area Wildfire Resources:
- Mutual-aid fire control agreements with 7 municipalities and 2 first nations.
- 62 Industrial Wildfire Control Plans (IWCP) Oil and Gas Industry
- 3 Forest Industry Fire Control Plans (Weyerhaeuser, Canfor, West Fraser)
- Mutual-aid resource sharing agreements and fire control plans are critical partnerships in managing wildfire season.
- No one partner has the capacity to manage all wildfires in a season.

Questions?

