

Wildfire Disturbance



There were 720 wildfires in Saskatchewan in 2015.

Why it matters

Healthy, vibrant forests can be renewed in different ways. They are renewed by fire. Renewal can also be achieved through harvesting practices that mimic the natural patterns created by wildfires. Some experts are predicting wildfire activity will increase globally, due to climate change. This can result in more intense burning conditions. New research suggests wildfire smoke is not as significant a contributor to climate change as other greenhouse gases.

What is happening

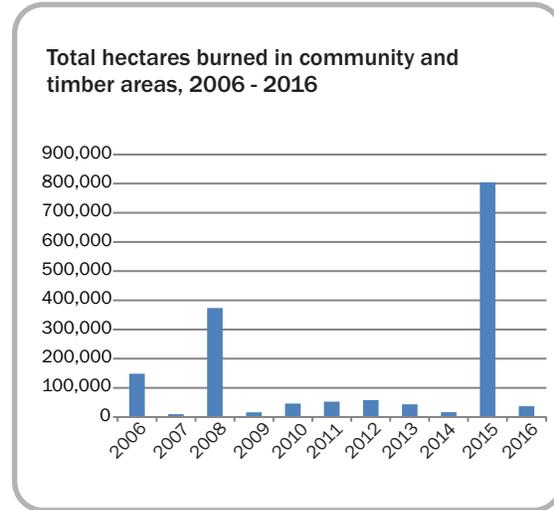
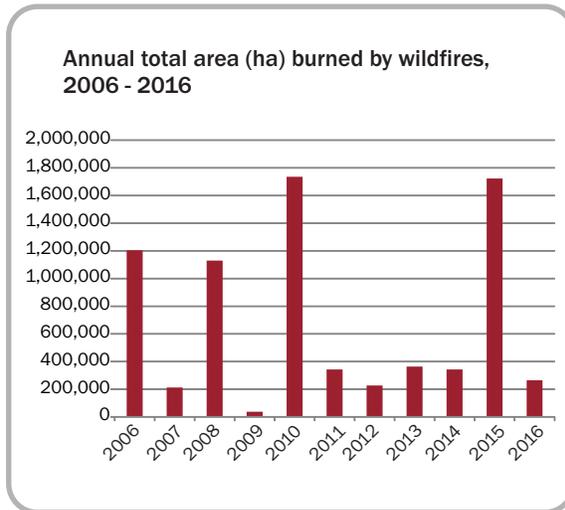
Over the last 10 years, half the wildfires in Saskatchewan were caused by humans and the other half were natural wildfires caused by lightning. In 2015, lightning caused about half of all our wildfires but accounted for almost 97 per cent of the total area burned. The total area burned by wildfires each year in Saskatchewan is extremely variable. In some years, burn areas are small. In other years, more than one million hectares have been affected. This variability can be due to normal changes in weather patterns, especially precipitation and temperature.

Number of Wildfires and Area Burned

NUMBER OF WILDFIRES/YEAR			AREA BURNED (ha)			Percentage of Total Area Burned	
Year	Number of Wildfires	Wildfire Cause (% lightning)	Community and Timber Areas	Area North of the Primary Timber Area	All Areas	% of Wildland Urban Interface Wildfires	% of Area North of Primary Timber area
2016*	364	53%	14,289.60	227,318.20	241,607.80	6%	94%
2015	720	52%	678,727.80	1,043,882.60	1,722,610.40	39%	61%
2014	397	49%	15,679.60	327,750.40	343,430.00	5%	95%
2013	429	37%	43,663.30	320,151.20	363,814.50	12%	88%
2012	409	49%	16,116.70	211,394.70	227,511.40	7%	93%
2011	303	21%	53,152.07	290,567.92	343,719.99	15%	85%
2010	571	40%	13,657.92	1,721,140.88	1,734,798.80	1%	99%
2009	511	36%	15,769.73	21,789.44	37,559.17	42%	58%
2008	599	47%	385,432.07	744,747.99	1,130,180.06	34%	66%
2007	370	36%	1,203.75	211,709.47	212,913.22	1%	99%
2006	501	66%	134,087.20	1,069,641.30	1,203,728.50	11%	89%
10 Year Average (2006-2015)	481.6	47%	135,751.31	596,277.59	732,028.91	16.70%	83.30%

Note: as at October 27, 2016*

HOW BIG IS A HECTARE? A hectare is 10,000 square metres, or roughly the size of a baseball field. The 2015 wildfire season burned an area of 1.722 million hectares.



What we are doing

The Ministry of Environment's wildfire management strategies are designed to protect the things most important to people: human life and communities. The ministry's strategy also considers wildfire's natural and beneficial role on the landscape. This balanced approach reduces the extreme costs associated with attempting to suppress all wildfires.

Other elements of the provincial wildfire strategy include:

- daily public reporting of the current status of wildfires during the wildfire season;
- fire bans during periods of high wildfire risk;
- the operation and maintenance of weather and fire observation towers;
- wildfire education and prevention programs; and
- suppression expertise that includes ground and air operations.

Wildfire management strategies direct the way the province responds to wildfires. New forest fires are mapped every year, adding to a database of landscape disturbances caused by wildfire in northern Saskatchewan. This record goes back 60 years and is an important planning tool for understanding the impact of wildfire on timber allocations and wildlife management.