



# Review of the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Season

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Submitted to the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency

May 22, 2026

**MNP**



## Land Acknowledgement

MNP acknowledges that work on this project with SPSA is conducted across the Province of Saskatchewan.

The SPSA's work reaches lands covered by Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, the traditional territories of the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Lakota, Nakota, and Saulteaux peoples, as well as the homeland of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan.

MNP respects and honours the Treaties made on all territories. We acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and are committed to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Nations in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

## With Appreciation to Participants

MNP acknowledges and sincerely appreciates the individuals and organizations that contributed to the Review of the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Season. The time, effort, and thoughtful input provided through interviews, meetings, and written submissions were essential to developing a comprehensive and informed understanding of the wildfire season and to identifying opportunities to strengthen Saskatchewan’s Wildfire and Emergency Management System.

Participants included representatives from the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA), other provincial ministries, municipal and regional partners, Indigenous organizations, industry interestholders, emergency responders, and community representatives. Their willingness to engage openly and share perspectives contributed significantly to the depth, quality, and integrity of the review.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of participants:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Government of Saskatchewan</li> <li>Ministries of:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Highways</li> <li>● Environment</li> <li>● Parks, Culture and Sport</li> <li>● Health (SHA)</li> <li>● Government Relations</li> <li>● Community Safety</li> <li>● Sask Marshals</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ SaskTel</li> <li>○ SaskPower</li> <li>○ Government of Manitoba</li> <li>○ Canadian Armed Forces</li> <li>○ Saskatchewan Association of Fire Chiefs (SAFC)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Saskatchewan Volunteer Fire Fighters Association (SVFFA)</li> <li>○ Search and Rescue Saskatchewan</li> <li>○ Association of Volunteers (SARSAV)</li> <li>○ Public Safety Canada</li> <li>○ The Salvation Army</li> <li>○ Forest Industry interestholder group</li> <li>○ Saskatchewan Commission of Professional Outfitters</li> <li>○ Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities</li> <li>○ New North Association</li> <li>○ Lac La Ronge Indian Band</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Métis Nation of Saskatchewan</li> <li>○ City of Saskatoon</li> <li>○ City of Regina</li> <li>○ City of Prince Albert</li> <li>○ City of North Battleford</li> <li>○ City of Weyburn</li> <li>○ Town of Creighton</li> <li>○ Town of La Ronge</li> <li>○ Village of Denare Beach</li> <li>○ Village of Beauval</li> <li>○ Village of Pelican Narrows</li> <li>○ East Trout Lake</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|

### Recognition of Technical Contributions

MNP would also like to recognize the contributions of **Forsite Consultants Ltd.**, who provided specialized expertise in forest management, wildfire behaviour analysis, and wildfire science. Their technical insight contributed to the analysis and interpretation of wildfire-related considerations.

## Limitation Considerations

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This report has been prepared for the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) in relation to the Review of the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Season.

The work performed by MNP was planned and conducted to evaluate the effectiveness, opportunities for improvement, and assess emerging risks and considerations related to enhancing SPSA's wildfire and emergency prevention, preparedness, response, evacuation, and recovery strategy. MNP does not accept responsibility or liability for decisions made by SPSA, or any third party, based on the use of this report. All decisions remain the sole responsibility of SPSA and are subject to its internal governance, management practices, and legislative authorities.

MNP's work was not designed to detect, and cannot be relied upon to detect, defalcations, fraud, or other irregularities. Accordingly, this report may not identify all matters that a more extensive or specialized examination might reveal.

In preparing this report and the associated recommendations, MNP relied on information provided by SPSA leadership, SPSA staff, and other engagement participants. Except where expressly stated, MNP did not independently verify the accuracy, completeness, or reliability of the information provided.

MNP is not responsible for any errors, omissions, or misrepresentations resulting from information that was withheld, incomplete, inaccurate, or otherwise misrepresented, whether intentionally or unintentionally, by SPSA or any individuals engaged during the review.

# Executive Summary

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The 2025 Wildfire Season was Canada’s second worst on record by area burned, with Saskatchewan experiencing an unprecedented operational environment: 514 wildfires burned approximately 2.9 million hectares, and more than 10,000 people were evacuated. In response, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) engaged MNP LLP (MNP) to conduct an independent external review to better understand what occurred, identify lessons learned to strengthen future wildfire and emergency management, and support public accountability. This report is not a forensic audit and is not intended to assign fault.

MNP applied a four-phase approach to this review, which included the review of 3,000+ documents, data review and analysis, and reporting. A trauma-informed approach was used to integrate documented actions with the feedback and lived experience of those involved in the 2025 wildfire response, to understand events leading up to and during the incident.

Engagement activities were conducted between October 28, 2025, and March 24, 2026. This included interviews and focus groups with interestholders identified by the SPSA. In addition, an internal staff survey and a public survey were available online from December 19, 2025, to January 31, 2026, to allow interestholders to share their experiences.<sup>1</sup>



**1,388**  
**Responses to the Public Survey**



**23 Focus Groups**



**145 Responses to the SPSA staff survey**



**66 Interviews**

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<sup>1</sup> The public survey conducted as part of this Review was not designed to produce statistically representative results. Instead, it served as a tool to gather general public sentiment and qualitative insights.

## Review Findings

The Review examined SPSA's wildfire and emergency management practices leading up to and during the 2025 Wildfire Season. MNP developed a framework to provide a systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The framework included five areas of focus, each supported by a guiding question.

- **Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation:** To what extent did wildfire prevention and mitigation activities take place in Saskatchewan in the years leading up to the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Event as compared to the SPSA's fire management plans and requirements?
- **Wildfire Readiness and Preparedness:** To what extent was the SPSA ready and prepared for a wildfire incident in Saskatchewan?
- **Wildfire & Emergency Response:** To what extent did the SPSA's wildfire and emergency response activities align with established procedures and was the response effective and appropriate in addressing the actual conditions and challenges of the 2025 Wildfire Season?
- **Evacuation Assessment:** How well were evacuation activities aligned with established roles and responsibilities for the SPSA and partners, and to what extent were emergency community supports effectively delivered to those in need?
- **Recovery Strategy:** To what degree is the SPSA following an established recovery strategy?

In addition to these five areas of focus, MNP's Review scope included a review of the SPSA's human resources, guided by the following question:

- To what extent do human resources policies and practices (including recruitment, retention, training, succession planning, psychological health and safety, and surge capacity strategies) align with the SPSA's strategic wildfire management goals and support operational readiness, role clarity, and continuity during wildfire prevention, mitigation, readiness, preparedness, response, and evacuation activities?

While human resources were treated as a distinct area of focus, human resources considerations are embedded throughout all sections of the report. As a result, some repetition may appear across different streams. This reflects the centralized role human resources plays across the organization and was intentional to ensure clarity, alignment, and consistency throughout the report.

## Key Finding Summary: Prevention and Mitigation

	<p><b>Significant Gaps</b></p>
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Wildfire prevention and mitigation planning aims to eliminate or reduce the ignition and severity of wildfires on life, property, and the environment. Activities can include fire bans, fuel reduction, and implementing other FireSmart disciplines.

SPSA’s prevention and mitigation activities align with the 2017 *Prairie Resilience Strategy and Climate Resilience Measurement Framework*, which includes a provincial target to treat 2,464 hectares of Crown land near communities by 2028. The analysis completed for this Review indicates that although progress is being made, it is not clear how the target was established nor do the targets appear to be grounded in an assessment of accumulated wildfire risk or fire science. The analysis found that, as a result, reported progress toward the target does not align with the scale or complexity of community-level mitigation needs or broader landscape-level wildfire risk. Evolving climate conditions and recent fire seasons further suggest the need to reassess current fuel mitigation targets to ensure effective risk reduction.

Additional challenges have been identified in program delivery and coordination. The mitigation team, though fully staffed at four members, is not sufficient to address the scale of required activities, a concern echoed by internal interestholders who recognize the need for more personnel. Coordination between SPSA and the Ministry of Environment’s Forestry Branch reflects an existing foundation of collaboration on wildfire preparedness, with an opportunity to further align efforts toward a more integrated, all-of-government approach to forest management and wildfire prevention.

## Key Findings: Wildfire and Emergency Preparedness

	<p><b>Significant Gaps</b></p>
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Emergency response and wildfire preparedness is the proactive process to plan, train, and position resources effectively to respond to an incident. Activities can include understanding risks and hazards, developing plans, procedures, and governance structures for a response, and training and educating staff.

While the SPSA had some foundational planning and structures, it was not fully prepared for a wildfire season of the scale and complexity seen in 2025. The establishment of the SPSA as a joint emergency management and wildfire operations agency does not appear to have been supported by an effective rollout or implementation framework, negatively impacting the consistency and effectiveness of the province’s wildfire and emergency management program.

Legacy systems, unclear and overlapping mandates across multiple pieces of legislation, and siloed operations persisted, resulting in uncertainty among staff regarding roles, responsibilities, and

decision-making authority. Internal policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were in place. However, they were difficult to access, inconsistently applied, and often outdated. Preparedness was further limited by insufficient pre-season planning, including delayed recruitment, training, and equipment procurement.

In addition, through engagement activities and responses to the internal survey, SPSA staff who participated in engagement and the staff survey indicated that they had not participated in an SPSA-led emergency tabletop exercise prior to the 2025 Wildfire Season. Such exercises are commonly used by emergency management agencies as a preparedness tool to support the implementation of the incident command system, identify gaps prior to an incident, and improve internal coordination and communication during the incident. Although SPSA leadership indicated that tabletop exercises had been conducted, documentation typically associated with tabletop exercises (e.g. exercise scenarios, dates, participant lists, and after-action learning documents) were not provided. Further documentation provided did not indicate that SPSA had a formal program, policies, or guidelines that required a regular internal tabletop exercise.

### Key Findings: Wildfire and Emergency Response

	<p><b>Limited Evidence</b></p>
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Emergency management response is the coordinated actions taken by government agencies, first responders, and other organizations to protect lives, property, and the environment during and immediately after disasters or emergencies. It includes activities such as warning the public, evacuations, search and rescue, medical care, sheltering, and coordination of resources.

Wildfire response is a specific type of emergency response focused on controlling and suppressing wildfires to reduce harm to people, property, and natural resources. It involves firefighting operations, evacuation planning, air and ground suppression tactics, and coordination among fire agencies and emergency management officials.

There is limited evidence that the SPSA’s emergency and wildfire response aligned with established procedures, and in many areas the response did not meet the expectations set out in Saskatchewan’s emergency management framework.

Primarily, the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC), whose purpose is outlined in the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan* and SPSA internal policy as the province’s central coordination hub, was activated but not operated as a fully functional coordination centre. The mandate and function of the PEOC were further confused by the SPSA’s operation of a Provincial Response Centre (PRC), resulting in limited tasking, uneven situational awareness, and inconsistent information flow. These gaps demonstrate that core elements of the province’s emergency management system were not effectively executed.

Additionally, although the SPSA had foundational structures, such as internal Standard Operating Procedures, the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan*, and widely required Incident Command System (ICS) training, these were inconsistently applied and understood, or difficult for staff to

access. Staff reported that internal policies were outdated, hard to find, or not followed, contributing to operational confusion and inconsistent decision-making during the response. Formal command structures were not implemented, and key emergency management principles, such as consistent use of ICS and clear role clarity, were not institutionalized across the organization.

## Key Findings: Evacuation Assessment



### Limited Evidence

Evacuation in emergency management response is the organized and systematic movement of people away from areas threatened by hazards. It should involve decision-making by authorities, clear communication with the public, and coordination of transportation, shelters, and support services. Effective evacuation planning prioritizes vulnerable populations and ensures routes and resources are in place before conditions become life-threatening.

There is limited evidence that evacuation activities during the 2025 Wildfire Season were aligned with the established roles and responsibilities of the SPSA and its partners. As outlined in legislation, a local authority is responsible for an emergency response, including an evacuation, unless the Minister assumes direction and control of the emergency, which happened in Saskatchewan on May 29, 2025. This resulted in confusion among SPSA and local authorities regarding who was responsible for evacuation activities.

Processes for issuing alerts and evacuation orders were inconsistent, often delayed, and lacked the standardized triggers or communication pathways that communities expected. As a result, host communities frequently received little notice of incoming evacuees, leaving communities underprepared and forced into reactive decision-making. These breakdowns in coordination, combined with unclear roles between the SPSA and partner agencies, created uncertainty, strained local capacity, and weakened confidence in the SPSA's ability to provide timely, consistent evacuation leadership.

Similarly, the Emergency and Community Support program (also referred to as Emergency Crisis Support) supports were not effectively delivered to evacuees due to structural and operational limitations within the program. The ECS system relied on outdated, paper-based registration processes that quickly collapsed under the high volumes of evacuees, leading to backlogs, duplicate files, and data accuracy issues. The absence of clear SOPs and the blurring of responsibilities between ECS and the PEOC further contributed to inefficiencies and confusion. SPSA staff were often tasked with responsibilities beyond the program's scope, such as administering emergency financial payments, reducing capacity for core supports and slowing service delivery. Collectively, these gaps led to inconsistent, delayed, and fragmented supports for evacuees during a period of heightened vulnerability.

## Key Findings: Recovery Strategy



### Limited Evidence

The recovery stage in emergency management refers to the planned actions taken after an emergency or disaster to restore communities, services, and infrastructure. An effective recovery strategy coordinates government agencies, non-profits, and community interestholders to support a safe and sustainable return to normalcy.

Saskatchewan did not have a provincial recovery strategy at the start of the season. While the SPSA quickly activated a Recovery Task Team, the absence of a strategy contributes to uncertainty on how the Province will approach recovery. While programs such as the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program contribute to recovery efforts, the program's policy has not been updated to reflect present day needs, and the shift to more frequent, higher impact, and longer duration emergency events that result in complex community and individual recovery needs.

Without a recovery strategy, recovery activities across the province are ad hoc, inconsistent, and lacking strategic coordination.

## Recommendations

The recommendations are provided as guidance to support SPSA's internal consideration of potential actions related to prevention and mitigation, preparedness, and response. They are designed to inform internal discussion, planning, and prioritization, rather than establish mandatory requirements or directives. SPSA retains full responsibility for evaluating these recommendations in the context of its operational environment, governance structures, resource availability, and risk tolerance.

1. **Review the SPSA's Structure to Ensure Organizational Alignment with Mandates as the Provincial Emergency Coordinator, Wildfire Management, and Emergency Dispatch:** Reviewing the organizational structure of the SPSA will help define core functions, streamline governance, and ensure staffing and structures align with the Agency's provincial responsibilities. The intended outcome is an organization with mission clarity across its three lines of service, strong lines of accountability, and a mandate that supports cohesive operations across its wildfire, emergency management, and emergency dispatch responsibilities.
2. **Strengthen Internal Emergency Management Coordination and Structure within SPSA and the Government of Saskatchewan:** A structured, province-wide emergency management exercise program is needed and should be delivered at provincial, regional/community, and internal levels. This will allow the SPSA and its collaborators to test procedures, strengthen communication pathways, and identify gaps before real events occur. Strengthening emergency management coordination and structure will improve activation clarity, streamline decision-making, and ensure that all hazards, not just wildfire, receive the necessary attention. The intended outcome is a well-practiced,

whole-of-province emergency management system where municipal and Indigenous communities, provincial staff, and external partners operate confidently, consistently, and collaboratively under pressure.

- 3. Improve Integration and Coordination Between the SPSA and Other Government of Saskatchewan Ministries, Agencies, Crown Corporations, and Communities:** This recommendation aims to establish structured, predictable cross-organizational coordination that clarifies responsibilities, strengthens shared situational awareness, and enables a unified approach across prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The intended outcome is a more coherent provincial emergency management system where multiple partners work from common processes, speak a shared operational language, and mobilize efficiently before and during critical events. This is especially important during mass evacuations. Strengthening evacuation planning and coordination will address these gaps by establishing standardized templates, improving data sharing, and clarifying roles across organizations, including communities with varying resources and capacities. The intended outcome is a predictable, equitable evacuation system that ensures communities receive timely support, host communities are prepared, and evacuees have access to the services they need.
- 4. Strengthen Fire Behaviour Modeling and Risk Mapping:** Strengthening modelling and mapping processes will enable more accurate risk identification, better resource allocation, and improved planning at provincial, regional, and community levels. The intended outcome is a modernized, scientifically credible risk-mapping system that provides the actionable insights needed to support prevention, readiness, and real-time wildfire response across the province and inclusive of various interestholders including the forestry industry.
- 5. Strengthen the Fuel Management Program through Site-Specific Prescriptions, Post-Treatment Monitoring, and Collaboration with External Partners:** Strengthening the SPSA's fuel management program will ensure fuel treatments are tailored to ecological conditions, tracked through robust monitoring, and aligned across agencies, Indigenous partners, industry, and municipalities. The intended outcome is a proactive, climate-resilient mitigation system that reduces risk to communities, increases program credibility, and improves long-term wildfire resilience.
- 6. Advance Workforce Planning and Training Schedules to Before the Wildfire Season:** Addressing these challenges would improve staffing stability, ensure SPSA staff are trained before peak demand, and reduce burnout and turnover. The SPSA would gain stronger readiness, more reliable operations, faster decision-making, and an enhanced ability to maintain service levels and scale effectively during high-pressure periods.
- 7. Proactively Initiate Procurement and Contracting Processes Before the Wildfire Season Starts:** Strengthening procurement and contract management, especially through pre-season planning and vendor prequalification, will support faster mobilization, clearer expectations for suppliers, and more reliable surge capacity. The intended outcome is a streamlined, predictable procurement system that enables timely access to critical supplies, equipment, and contracted support before the wildfire season begins.

- 8. Improve Equipment Management and Equipment Recovery:** Integrating a formalized equipment recovery process is essential to maintain asset availability and safeguard public investment. The intended outcome is a transparent, standardized, province-wide equipment system that strengthens operational readiness, reduces downtime during emergencies, and ensures timely equipment recovery following deployment.
- 9. Develop a Provincial Recovery Strategy Including a Disaster Social Recovery Framework:** Developing a provincial recovery strategy will guide communities, agencies, and partners toward a structured, holistic, and sustainable approach to post-disaster recovery. The intended outcome is a modern recovery system that prioritizes social well-being, supports long-term community resilience, and provides clear direction after major events.
- 10. Advance a Culture of Continuous Improvement by Prioritizing After-Action Reviews** Implementing a continuous improvement framework will ensure that incident-specific insights are documented, shared, and acted upon, thereby strengthening readiness and response over time. The intended outcome is an organizational culture where lessons are routinely captured, changes are implemented, and performance improves year-after-year.
- 11. Foster Positive Organizational Culture and Improve Availability of Psychological Health Supports:** The SPSA is encouraged to take direct action to further strengthen psychological safety, enhance the availability and visibility of mental health supports, and nurture a more collaborative and inclusive organizational culture. Staff shared that high stress incidents can sometimes make it challenging to access proactive supports; while many do utilize internal mental health resources, there remains a tendency to also rely on informal peer networks. This indicates an opportunity to build greater awareness and trust in the supports already in place. In addition, siloed operations, occasional cultural tensions between departments, and inconsistent information sharing have at times affected teamwork, morale, and overall organizational cohesion. Staff expressed a desire for more direct engagement with leadership and for staff expertise to be more consistently recognized and valued. By prioritizing psychological safety alongside inclusive culture initiatives, SPSA can strengthen workforce resilience, enhance morale, and ensure all staff feel valued and empowered to contribute to organizational success.

## Conclusion

The 2025 Wildfire Season placed the SPSA in an extraordinary operating environment, characterized by prolonged drought, periods of extreme fire behaviour, and multiple significant fires occurring at the same time. With hundreds of wildfires, millions of hectares burned, and large-scale evacuations, the pace and concurrency of events stretched people, systems, and logistics beyond what is typically required in a single-incident response. In these conditions, the commitment and effort demonstrated by SPSA staff, community leaders, responders, Indigenous partners, provincial ministries, and external supporting organizations were essential to protecting lives and supporting affected communities.

At the same time, the 2025 Wildfire Season placed Saskatchewan's wildfire and emergency management system under significant strain due to extreme, but reasonably foreseeable, conditions after consecutive years of extreme wildfire seasons in Canada. In doing so, the 2025 Wildfire Season revealed clear opportunities for improvement, many of which reflect latent, pre-existing systemic issues that were exposed or intensified by the severity of the season, rather than caused by it. Findings point to the need for a more risk- and science-informed prevention and mitigation framework that is grounded in accumulated wildfire risk and supported by sufficient capacity and inter-agency coordination. More consistent readiness is also required through earlier workforce planning, training, contracting, and pre-season exercises.

During response, the scale and concurrence of simultaneous incidents amplified the impacts of unclear roles, uneven application of incident management structures, and inconsistent information flow, underscoring the importance of a clearly defined and consistently operated provincial coordination model. Evacuation experiences reinforced the need for standardized triggers and communications, stronger host-community coordination, and modernized emergency community support processes that can scale during high-volume events.

Recovery similarly emerged as an area for growth: the absence of a clearly articulated provincial recovery strategy created uncertainty for communities and partners as operations transitioned from response to longer-term rebuilding and support, contributing to ad hoc and inconsistent recovery efforts.

The recommendations in this report set out a practical path to translate lessons from an unprecedented season into sustained improvement. They emphasize clarifying mandates and governance, enhancing coordination and capability across communities and government, modernizing tools and processes, and supporting workforce wellbeing. Implemented collectively, these actions position the SPSA, and Saskatchewan more broadly, to strengthen a more resilient, integrated emergency management system, better equipped for increasingly complex wildfire seasons ahead.

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## List of Key Terms and Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AARs	After Action Reviews
CISM	Critical Incident Stress Management
CSO	Civil Service Organizations
ECS	Emergency and Community Support Program
EFAP	Employee and Family Assistance Program
EM	Emergency Management
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EPA	Emergency Planning Act
EPO	Emergency Planning Officer
ERP	Emergency Response Plan
ESO	Emergency Services Officer
FSA	Fire Safety Act
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GoS	Government of Saskatchewan
HR	Human Resources
IAP	Incident Action Plan
IC	Incident Commander
ICS	Incident Command System
LLRIB	Lac La Ronge Indian Band
MNP	MNP LLP, the Canadian consulting firm engaged to conduct the Review
NMS	Northern Municipal Services

Acronym	Definition
NSAD	Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District
PDAP	Provincial Disaster Assistance Program
PEMP	Provincial Emergency Management Plan
PEOC	Provincial Emergency Operations Centre
PRC	Provincial Response Centre
PSPNET	Public Safety Professional Network
RTT	Recovery Task Team
SHA	Saskatchewan Health Authority
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPSA	Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency
SPSA Act	Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Act
WUI	Wildland-Urban Interface



## 1.0 Introduction and Context Setting

## Purpose and Scope of the Review

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (“SPSA” or “the Agency”) engaged MNP to conduct the independent external Review of the 2025 Wildfire Season (“the Review”). The objective of the Review is to better understand the facts around the 2025 Wildfire events, establish lessons learned to support future planning in wildfire management, and support public accountability (Table 1). This report is not a forensic audit or an investigation to assign fault.

**Table 1: The Scope of the Review**

In Scope for the Review	Out of Scope for the Review
<p><b>Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-season wildfire prevention planning and strategy adaptation</li> <li>• Fuel mitigation and FireSmart initiatives</li> <li>• Public safety education and mitigation outreach</li> <li>• Regulatory controls and notification systems</li> </ul> <p><b>Wildfire Readiness and Preparedness Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildfire season preparedness and interagency coordination</li> <li>• Technology integration for wildfire management</li> </ul> <p><b>Wildfire and Emergency Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildfire response operations and internal coordination</li> <li>• Frontline staff support and well-being</li> <li>• Emergency management structure and integration</li> <li>• Third-party coordination and integration</li> <li>• Crisis communications</li> </ul> <p><b>Evacuation Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency and Community Support (ECS) Program delivery and effectiveness</li> </ul> <p><b>Recovery Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency with the province’s approach to recovery. Comprehensive recovery reviews are typically conducted later and fall outside the scope of an initial review such as this.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis on the origin of the 2025 Wildfire Season or season, including the origin of individual fires or wildfires</li> <li>• Prior, current, and future recovery operations and recovery related initiatives at the community, regional, and provincial levels</li> <li>• Other Government of Saskatchewan (GoS) Ministry roles during the wildfire response, other than where they interfaced with the SPSA</li> <li>• The wildfire and emergency response and activities of municipalities, First Nations, Métis communities and organizations, except for where they interacted with the SPSA</li> <li>• Federal efforts or other provincial efforts, except for where they interacted with the SPSA</li> </ul>

## Guiding Review Questions

The Review examines the relevance and effectiveness of the SPSA’s prevention and mitigation, readiness and preparedness, response, evacuation, and human resource practices related to the 2025 Saskatchewan wildfire season. The Review seeks to answer these guiding questions identified in Table 2.

**Table 2: Guiding Review Questions**

Review Topics	Guiding Review Questions
Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation	1. To what extent did wildfire prevention and mitigation activities take place in Saskatchewan in the years leading up to the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Event as compared to the SPSA’s fire management plans and requirements?
Wildfire Readiness and Preparedness	2. To what extent was the SPSA ready and prepared for a wildfire incident in Saskatchewan?
Wildfire & Emergency Response	3. To what extent did the SPSA’s wildfire and emergency response activities align with established procedures and was the response effective and appropriate in addressing the actual conditions and challenges of the 2025 Wildfire Season?
Evacuation Assessment	4. How well were evacuation activities aligned with established roles and responsibilities for the SPSA and partners, and to what extent were ECS supports effectively delivered to those in need?
Recovery Strategy	5. To what degree is the SPSA following an established recovery strategy?

### Review of Human Resources (HR) Practices Spanning All Five Review Topics<sup>2</sup>

*To what extent do HR policies and practices (including recruitment, retention, training, succession planning, psychological health and safety, and surge capacity strategies) align with the SPSA’s strategic wildfire management goals and support operational readiness, role clarity, and continuity during wildfire prevention, mitigation, readiness, preparedness, response, and evacuation activities?*

<sup>2</sup> This Report was developed as an integrated document. While HR was treated as a distinct area of focus, HR considerations are embedded throughout all sections of the report. As a result, some repetition may appear across different streams. This reflects the centralized role HR plays across the organization and was intentional to ensure clarity, alignment, and consistency throughout the report.

## A Four Phased Approach to the Review

MNP applied a four-phase approach to conducting this Review. The trauma-informed approach was designed to incorporate documented actions and the feedback and experience from those involved in the 2025 wildfire response to understand the events that occurred leading up to, and during, the incident.



### Phase 1: Planning (October 2025)

Planning activities included developing the Review Plan, Engagement Plan, and Data Collection Tools that guided the Review.



### Phase 2: Data Collection (November 2025 to May 2026)

- **Document Review:** An initial document request was provided to SPSA in November 2025 and data provided included:
  - Over 11,000 documents related to the scope of the Review; approximately 3,000 documents were reviewed.<sup>3</sup>
  - Additional documentation was requested throughout the Review as interestholders made MNP aware of additional information. This was collected through February 2026.
  - SPSA provided additional documentation in March, April, and May 2026.
- **Jurisdictional Scan** of practices in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba to understand common practices in other provinces related to the scope of the Review.
- **Engagement** with SPSA staff and external partners, including other provinces, the federal government, municipalities, and industry groups.



### Phase 3: Data Analysis (December 2025 to February 2026)

All the data collected was analyzed to consider documented practices and measure them against the experience of interestholders.



### Phase 4: Reporting and Recommendations (January 2026 to May 2026)

The results of the data analysis were synthesized into key findings and presented to SPSA for review and the provision of additional information in late January 2026 and March 2026. with additional documentation and engagement through February – May 2026.

The finalized Report findings are outlined herein. Recommendations have been designed to be practical, actionable, and aligned with leading practices in the field to drive sustainable change.

<sup>3</sup> MNP reviewed all documents that were provided related to preparation, readiness, and response. Many of the documents provided were maps, of which not all were relied upon for this Review.

## Engagement by the Numbers

Engagement activities were conducted between October 28, 2025, and March 24, 2026. This included interviews and focus groups with interestholders<sup>4</sup> identified by the SPSA. In addition, an internal staff survey and a public survey were available online from December 19, 2025, to January 31, 2026, to allow interestholders to share their experiences.<sup>5</sup>



1,388

Responses to the Public Survey



23 Focus Groups



66 Interviews



145

SPSA staff<sup>6</sup> surveys

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<sup>4</sup> The term “interestholder” is used to refer to a variety of organizations, partners, and other levels of government. The purpose of using this term is to promote anonymity, especially if in the context of an interview, focus group, or large targeted focus group. Where necessary for explicit clarity, we have identified observations shared by specific group(s) of external interestholders (e.g., municipalities, fire departments, forestry industry partners); however, this report defaults to the “interestholder” term to maintain confidentiality.

<sup>5</sup> The public survey conducted as part of this Review was not designed to produce statistically representative results. Instead, it served as a tool to gather general public sentiment and qualitative insights to help inform the project’s direction.

<sup>6</sup> The term “SPSA staff” is used to refer specifically to one or more SPSA staff members across all levels of the organization including, but not limited to, frontline staff, headquarter staff, administrative staff, or executive staff. The purpose of using this term is to promote anonymity, especially if in the context of an interview, focus group, or large targeted focus group.

Interviews and focus groups included participants representing a range of interestholders. Findings from these engagements were supplemented by a review of SPSA documentation related to the 2025 Wildfire Season.



**7 First Nation Leaders and Métis Leaders**



**62 Emergency Services and Firefighting Professionals**



**11 Forestry Industry Professionals**



**15 Municipalities**



**115 SPSA and Contracted Staff**



**Approx. 3,000 Documents Reviewed**

(including, but not limited to, internal policies, reports and briefings, legislation and regulations, and situational reports and relevant fire maps from the 2025 Wildfire Season)

## Context Setting: The Evolution of the SPSA

The SPSA is a Crown Corporation responsible for overseeing all aspects of Saskatchewan's emergency management, including 911 and the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) and wildfire response.

### The SPSA's Mandate

"The SPSA provides or supports public safety services for and with the people, municipalities, Indigenous peoples, public safety service providers and the Government of Saskatchewan."

- *The SPSA Act (2019)*

### The SPSA Mission Statement

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency safeguards and protects the people, property and resources of Saskatchewan through partnerships, coordinated planning, education, prevention, mitigation, response and recovery.

- *SPSA Annual Report 2024-2025*

## The Creation of a Crown Corporation to Coordinate Emergency Dispatch

The SPSA was established in 2017 as a Treasury Board Crown Corporation to oversee 911 and emergency dispatch services.<sup>7</sup> The GoS noted in a press release that SPSA was established as a Crown Corporation, rather than a ministry branch, to streamline governance and improve technology and service expansion for emergency communications across the rapidly growing province.<sup>8</sup> At its creation, SPSA reported to the Minister of Government Relations.

## An Expanded Mandate for The SPSA

The GoS announced a major expansion of the SPSA's role in 2019, when it merged the Wildfire Management Branch from the Ministry of Environment and the Emergency Management and the Fire Safety Programs from the Ministry of Government Relations. This change came into effect in early 2020 following the passage of *The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Act (SPSA ACT)* in June 2019.

This change resulted in the SPSA becoming the single provincial organization for wildfire suppression, emergency management, 911 dispatch, and fire code oversight. The change was implemented to enhance operational efficiency and resolve issues related to uncertainty regarding the appropriate ministry to contact in an emergency.<sup>9</sup> Throughout 2019 and into 2020, staff,

<sup>7</sup> SPSA Annual Report 2018-19. <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/103224>

<sup>8</sup> Government of Saskatchewan, 2017. "Saskatchewan 911 Service To Be Transferred to New Crown Corporation." <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2017/september/28/911-services-under-public-safety-agency>

<sup>9</sup> [Province to combine government relations and wildfire management under SPSA - Prince Albert Daily Herald](#)

resources, and responsibilities were transferred from the two ministries into the SPSA. The 2019 wildfire season remained under the direction of the Ministry of Environment but transitioned to the SPSA for the next season. The SPSA was fully operational by April 1, 2020.

In the new structure, the Minister of Community Safety is responsible for the SPSA. As a Crown Corporation, the *SPSA Act* stipulates that the SPSA shall be managed by a board of directors to consist of not more than seven directors, one of whom shall be appointed chairperson, all to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. During the 2025 Wildfire Season, the board was comprised of a single board member who was the Minister of Corrections, Policing, and Public Safety. As of March 2026, the Board of Directors consists of five elected officials and is chaired by the Minister of Community Safety (formerly Corrections, Policing and Public Safety).

Additionally, the *SPSA Act* enables the Lieutenant Governor General in Council to appoint a President for the SPSA to oversee the operations of the Agency. As a Crown Corporation, the SPSA is required to prepare a public annual report which provides information on the progress made on the Operational Plan, the activities of the Fire Commissioner, and the activities of Sask911.

## Context Setting: Saskatchewan's Emergency Management and Wildfire Management Framework

In Saskatchewan, like many other provinces, emergency management and wildfire response is a shared responsibility between communities (e.g., municipalities, First Nations) and the province. Several pieces of legislation and policy make up Saskatchewan's emergency management and wildfire management framework:

- ***The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Act and related regulations:*** Establishes the SPSA as an agent of the Crown responsible for providing and supporting public safety services for people, municipalities, Indigenous groups, and public safety service providers. Related regulations prescribe SPSA responsibility under various Public Safety regulations including: the *Wildfire Regulations*, *Public Safety Answering Point Regulations*, *Fire Safety Regulations*, *Provincial Disaster Assistance Program Regulations*, and *Emergency 911 System Regulations*.
- ***The Emergency 911 System Act and related regulations:*** Establishes, operates, and regulates the province-wide Sask911 system, connecting callers to emergency services via a Public Safety Answering Point and a radio network. It mandates participation from municipalities and service providers, manages funding via a monthly fee and ensures confidentiality of emergency caller information.
- ***The Emergency Planning Act (EPA) and related regulations:*** Continues Saskatchewan Emergency Planning as a unit of the SPSA and outlines creation of provincial planning committee. It also:
  - Mandates local authorities to develop local emergency plans and establish local emergency measures organizations, appoint an emergency measures coordinator, and establish local emergency planning committees.

- Gives both the GoS and municipalities the power to order an evacuation, depending on the situation.
- Outlines that the municipality is responsible for an emergency response, including an evacuation, unless the Minister assumes direction and control of the emergency.
  - If the local authority makes an evacuation order in a local emergency, Section 21(1)(a)(vii) states that they must “make arrangements for the adequate care and protection of those persons or livestock and of the personal property”.
  - If the Province makes an evacuation order in a provincial emergency, Section 18(1)(i) states the Province must “make arrangements for the adequate care and protection of those persons or livestock and of the personal property.”
- Allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council to establish emergency planning districts and district committees.
- Sets out the powers of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, Ministries, and local governments in emergency planning and declaring an emergency.
- **The Provincial Emergency Management Plan (PEMP):** GoS-wide framework for planning and responding to emergencies that require coordinated provincial response. It is activated when a provincial emergency is declared. The PEMP uses the Incident Command System (ICS) as a framework and outlines roles and responsibilities for an Emergency Management Governance Structure and an Emergency Response Governance Structure.
- **The Fire Safety Act (FSA) and related regulations:** Is administered by the SPSA and mandates fire prevention, investigation, and safety standards. It adopts the *National Fire Code* (2020) as the minimum standard, empowering communities to enforce, conduct inspections, and investigate fire causes/origins. The legislation also states that the president of the SPSA can be appointed as Fire Commissioner, and it details the responsibilities of the position.
- **The Wildfire Act and related regulations:** Outline technical responsibilities and authorities related to wildfire suppression, including powers associated with wildfire suppression activities, industrial and commercial operations, and inspections and investigations. It also:
  - Defines the provincial forest as designated according to Section 12 of the *Forest Resources Management Act*. The Ministry of Environment oversees the designation of Crown land as provincial forest.
  - Governs the assessment of damage or loss caused by wildfires.
  - Enables the Minister under the legislation to take any action to control and extinguish a wildfire in any part of Saskatchewan.
  - Outlines the responsibility of rural municipalities to fight fires that start or burn in the rural municipality.
  - Sets out compliance requirements for commercial/industrial operators.

## Role of Local Authorities as the Primary Responder

Local authorities<sup>10</sup> are the primary responders to an emergency in their jurisdiction. Under the EPA, they are responsible for the coordination of local resources, including police, fire, and emergency services, to manage incidents and to escalate to higher levels of government for additional support as required. They are responsible for developing and implementing local emergency plans, establishing emergency measures organizations, appointing coordinators, and forming emergency planning committees to oversee municipal preparedness.

During emergencies, the EPA and PEMP outline the responsibility of local authorities to direct and control their response efforts, which includes evacuations. If a provincial emergency declaration is issued, the Minister may assume direction and control of the emergency, including evacuation.

Local authorities have the power to declare emergencies for all or part of their jurisdiction. These declarations grant community leaders the authority to operationalize emergency plans, regulate travel, provide and coordinate essential services, manage evacuations, and exercise powers typically reserved for the Minister. Emergency declarations last for seven days unless renewed and may be extended or cancelled by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The EPA outlines that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may establish, by order, emergency planning districts “for the purpose of organizing intermunicipal emergency planning, training, assistance and emergency operations programs.” A review of Orders in Council found no evidence that emergency planning districts have been established. Instead, SPSA encourages local authorities to collaborate through mutual aid agreements with neighbouring municipalities or other bodies to strengthen collective response capabilities and to access resources for emergency use.




## Role of SPSA as the Lead Emergency and Wildfire Management Agency

The SPSA is responsible for enforcing *The Emergency 911 System Act*, *The EPA*, *The FSA*, and *The Wildfire Act*. Within legislation and the PEMP, the SPSA is identified as Saskatchewan’s emergency coordination agency. They are directed with providing programs and services to fire departments and emergency organizations and work with municipalities and First Nations. According to the various legislation, the SPSA’s responsibilities can be broken up into three main functions: Provincial Emergency Coordination, Wildfire Management, and Emergency Dispatch. During an emergency, if local capacity is insufficient, the SPSA may assume direction and control of a local emergency response.

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<sup>10</sup> As defined in the EPA, a local authority “means the council of a municipality.”

**Table 3: The role of the SPSA under its guiding legislation and policy**

		
<b>Provincial Emergency Coordination</b>	<b>Fire and Wildfire Management</b>	<b>Emergency Dispatch</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and administer the <i>Provincial emergency Management Plan (PEMP)</i></li> <li>• Manage the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) to coordinate an all-of-government response</li> <li>• Support communities with emergency planning and risk reduction</li> <li>• With respect to First Nations, the PEMP encourages the SPSA to collaborate in planning and response efforts. Arrangements are in place with First Nations to activate provincial resources and supports when they have exceeded their capacity<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Support communities with recovery efforts, including administering the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program</li> <li>• Coordinate and implement training programs related to the PEMP for Ministry, Crown, and Agency staff through SPSA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as the Saskatchewan Fire Commissioner</li> <li>• Ensure compliance with the <i>National Fire Code</i></li> <li>• Establish minimum standards for local fire services</li> <li>• Issue fire bans</li> <li>• Conduct wildfire mitigation projects, such as fuel management</li> <li>• Manage, suppress, and extinguish wildfires in the provincial forest, provincial parks, and the Wildfire Management Area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administer the 911 program</li> <li>• Administer the SaskAlert App</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Saskatchewan Provincial Emergency Management Plan, pg 5. <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/119381>

## Role of the Government of Saskatchewan in Supporting a Unified Approach to Emergency Management

The PEMP outlines a multi-level governance framework for the GoS to support emergency management. All ministries, crowns, and agencies are required to develop Emergency Response Plans (ERPs) that align with the PEMP and utilize standardized ICS, ensuring a consistent and unified approach across the province. The PEMP outlines an emergency management governance structure to clarify the relationship and authorities between levels of government related to emergency management.

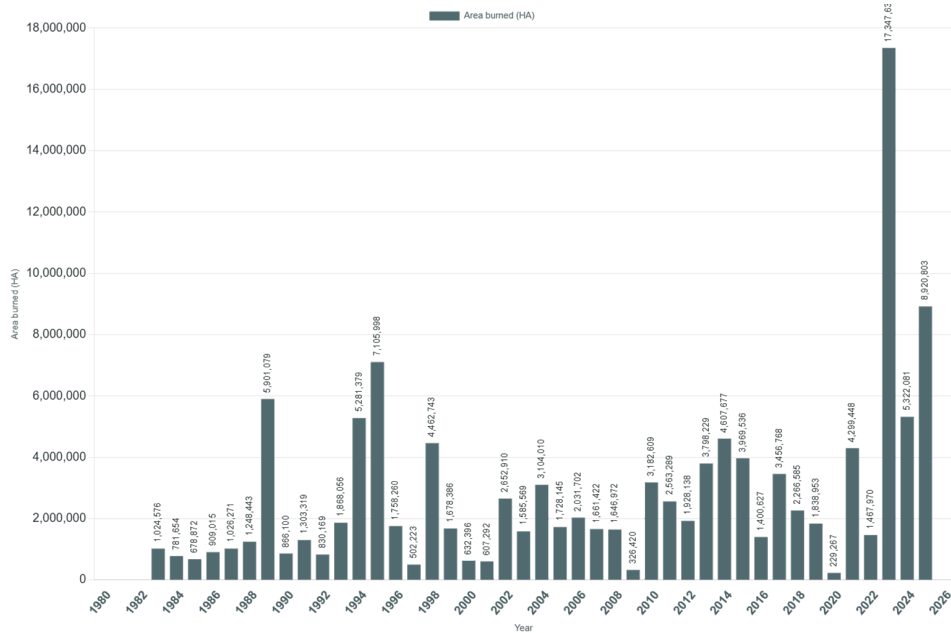
At the highest level, the Lieutenant Governor in Council has the authority to establish emergency planning districts and committees, declare emergencies, and designate affected areas. As noted, based on a review of Orders in Council, there is no evidence that emergency planning districts have been established. If created, these district committees would comprise representatives from communities, ministries, and Crown Corporations, support intermunicipal planning, training, and emergency operations, and assist municipalities in developing their own emergency plans.

As outlined in the PEMP, Section 5.1.2, cabinet oversees the provincial emergency response strategy, approves communication and messaging, and ensures continuity of government operations. During emergencies, the Minister can implement emergency plans, assume control of local emergency responses, coordinate essential services, and order evacuations.

## Context Setting: The 2025 Wildfire Season

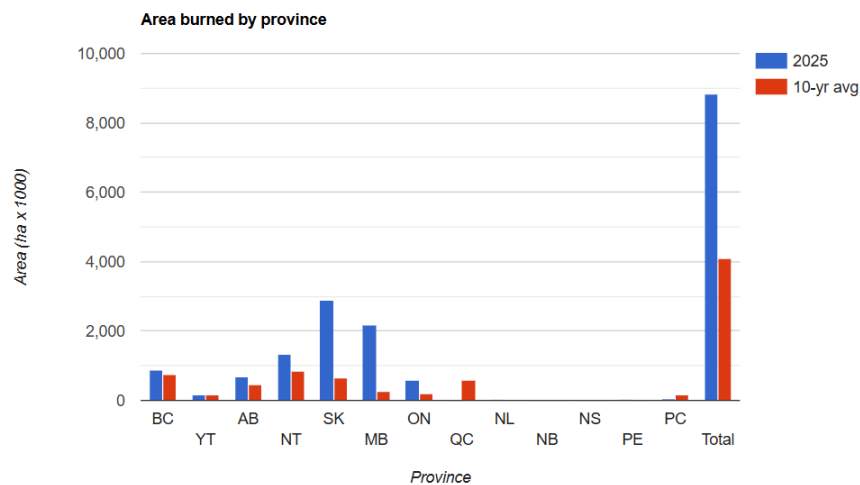
The 2025 Wildfire Season was Canada’s second-worst season in history in terms of area burned. At the end of 2025, approximately 8.9 million hectares were burned across more than 6,000 wildfires in almost every province and territory. The total hectares burned in 2025 are second only to 2023 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Canadian Wildfire Area Burned by Year (in hectares)**



Approximately half of the total fire-affected area was in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Area Burned by Province**



While some initial spring weather forecast called for a typical spring, with normal levels of precipitation, a high-pressure system that locked hot, dry air over Central Canada drove temperatures to soar 10°C to 14°C above seasonal norms in May 2025. This temperature spike, combined with drought-like conditions contributed to significant fire activity in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, and Newfoundland.<sup>12,13</sup> The presence of multiple fires across multiple provinces caused the National Preparedness Level (NPL) to climb from level 1 in early May to level 5 by end of May.

## Conditions Leading Into the 2025 Wildfire Season in Saskatchewan

The Wildfire Regulations under *The Wildfire Act* define Saskatchewan's wildfire season as running from April 1 to October 31 each year. In 2025, wildfire activity in Saskatchewan peaked between May and July, when the majority of fires, associated damage, and displacement occurred.

In April 2025, the SPSA's *Spring Risk Outlook Report*<sup>14</sup> was released, which included information gathered from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and other sources about weather, the spring run-off and current conditions, and wildfire preparedness. The report contained data for the winter months (December to February), forecasts for spring (March to May), and summer (June to August).

During the winter months of December 2024 through February 2025, temperatures stayed close to average; however, a cold spell in February led all 11 Saskatchewan weather stations to record one of the top three coldest Februaries ever. Most stations reported two-thirds to nearly normal precipitation, though Prince Albert, Meadow Lake, and North Battleford received less than usual. North Battleford experienced its 13<sup>th</sup> driest winter on record. Forecasts indicated that spring temperatures would exceed seasonal norms, with even higher temperatures expected during the summer; however, as standard, the report caveated that predictions for subsequent months are subject to greater uncertainty. Below normal precipitation conditions were expected to continue in northern Saskatchewan.

The conditions described in the SPSA's *Spring Risk Outlook Report* placed most of the province in the moderate drought risk category, with the northeast and southwest regions of the province falling in the high-risk category. This was due to 2024 fall moisture conditions ranging from below normal to exceptionally dry, with the northeast region being among the driest in the province.

*"Wildfire risk exists within the entire province with lots of ignition potential. The northwest portion of the province, including the Buffalo Narrows and La Loche regions, are at an increased risk for heightened wildfire activity."*

- Spring Risk Outlook Report, April 2025

While meteorological conditions play an important role on a wildfire season, so too does wildfire management policies and practices. Historically, wildfire management was based on fire exclusion

<sup>12</sup> <https://cwfis.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/report>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/science-research-data/climate-trends-variability/trends-variations/spring-2025-bulletin.html>

<sup>14</sup> SPSA. April, 2025. "Spring Risk Outlook Report." <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/125920>

principles within wildland ecosystems, with all Canadian provinces and territories enacting legislation in the 1900s that were focussed on preventing and eliminating fires on the landscape.<sup>15</sup> The impact of these policies, including decades of emphasis on the suppression of forest fires, has changed forest and wildland ecosystems, with larger amount of flammable biomass on the landscape as compared to historical records.<sup>16</sup>

The understanding of fires in natural settings has evolved, with an increased appreciation of fires being a natural cyclical event in ecosystems, with prescribed burns used by some jurisdictions as a management tool, and with many wildfire agencies shifting from suppression of all fires to monitoring some fires and employing risks management tools to determine if suppression action will be deployed.<sup>17</sup> However, barriers continue to limit wide-spread application of such activities within Canada, including a lack of capacity, training, risk-based systems, and understanding of wildland fire management techniques within the general public, and public health concerns related to smoke and air quality.

In addition to these challenges, climate change also presents a further challenge to fire management agencies, with longer and extreme fire seasons becoming more frequent, along with longer term changes to the ecological composition of landscape. While fire management agencies have access to advanced fire modelling software and analytics, further investment is needed to transition to innovative and integrated wildfire management that restores wildfire-dependent ecosystems.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Christianson, A.C., J. Park, R. Gray, S. Murphy, K. Hoffman, and G. Walker. 2023. Canada: The Impact of Fire-Exclusion Legislation. *Wildfire*. April. Retrieved from: <https://www.iawfonline.org/article/canada-the-impact-of-fire-exclusion-legislation/>.

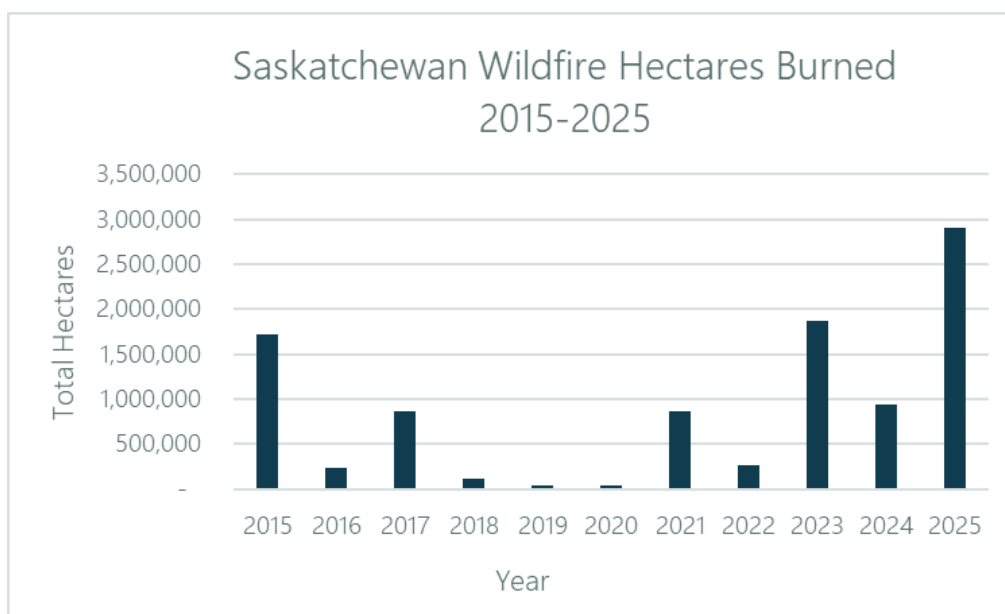
<sup>16</sup> Canadian Council of Forest Ministers. 2024. Canadian Wildland Fire Prevention Strategy and Mitigation Strategy: Taking Action Together. Retrieved from: [https://www.ccfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CWFPM-Strategy-EN-2024-06-05-FINAL-\\_V09.pdf](https://www.ccfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CWFPM-Strategy-EN-2024-06-05-FINAL-_V09.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Tymstra, C., B.J. Stocks, X. Cai, and M.D. Flanigan. 2020. Wildfire management in Canada: Review, challenges and opportunities. *Progress in Disaster Science*. (5: January).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 2020.

In comparing the Saskatchewan 2025 Wildfire Season to the prior ten years, the number of hectares burned in 2025 was more than 55% greater than in 2023, which was the next worst year in this ten-year timeframe (Table 4). The 2025 Wildfire Season saw more than 3.22 times more hectares burned over the average over the last 10 years (898,436). The table below outlines hectares burned over the last ten years, and the winter precipitation/snowpack conditions with the accompanying drought conditions.

**Figure 3: Saskatchewan Wildfire Hectares Burned (2010-2015)<sup>19</sup>**



<sup>19</sup> Saskatchewan Provincial Emergency Management Report (2015); Saskatchewan State of Emergency Review Report (2015); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Conditions at Freeze-Up Report (2016, 2019, 2020, 2021); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Preliminary Runoff Outlook (2023, 2024, 2025); Government of Saskatchewan – History of Drought Impacts in Saskatchewan; Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Annual Report (2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25); Natural Resources Canada — Canadian Wildland Fire Information System (CWFIS); National Wildland Fire Situation Report / Seasonal Summary (2025)

**Table 4: Saskatchewan Wildfire, Drought and Winter Moisture Summary (2015-2025)<sup>20</sup>**

Year	Hectares Burned	Drought Conditions	Winter Precipitation/Snowpack
2015	1.7–1.722 million ha	Severe fire season linked to dry/warm conditions	Below-normal to low snowpack
2016	241,607.8 ha	No single province-wide drought classification located	Average snowpack; wet freeze-up in many areas
2017	860,000 ha	Severe widespread dry conditions, with some areas recording their driest period.	Sporadic, below-normal snowfall for many areas
2018	118,984.3 ha	Localized dry conditions in southwest	Below-normal precipitation and snowpack
2019	47,737 ha	Mixed moisture conditions	Above-average fall precipitation; near-normal winter forecast
2020	42,160.2 ha	Drier than normal entering winter in southern regions	Above-normal winter precipitation forecast
2021	864,791.1 ha	Province experienced drought	Near-normal winter precipitation forecast
2022	265,340 ha	Dry conditions continued in southwest / west-central regions	Below-normal snowpack in some regions
2023	1,867,695 ha	Severe drought reported	Variable snowpack (above normal central; below normal southwest/north)
2024	936,042 ha	Conditions improved compared with prior drought years	Near-normal to above-normal snowfall in most areas
2025	2.9 million ha	Widespread moisture deficit and periods of elevated temperatures contributed to high fire danger rating	Below-average winter precipitation and reduced snowpack contributed to early seasonal drying of fuels
<b>Avg. over 10 years: 898,435 ha</b>			

<sup>20</sup> Saskatchewan Provincial Emergency Management Report (2015); Saskatchewan State of Emergency Review Report (2015); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Conditions at Freeze-Up Report (2016, 2019, 2020, 2021); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Preliminary Runoff Outlook (2023, 2024, 2025); Government of Saskatchewan – History of Drought Impacts in Saskatchewan; Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Annual Report (2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25); Natural Resources Canada — Canadian Wildland Fire Information System (CWFIS); National Wildland Fire Situation Report / Seasonal Summary (2025)

## Timeline of Administrative Events of the 2025 Wildfire Season

MNP developed a timeline of key events for the 2025 Wildfire Season based on a review of available documentation. Sources included SPSA situation reports (May 27 to June 27, 2025.<sup>21</sup> SPSA Risk Outlook Reports (January to September 2025), and publicly available news releases. This timeline complements the summary of key events for the SHOE, WOLF, and PISEW fires provided later in this section. A separate timeline of major wildfire ignitions is provided in Section 4.0.

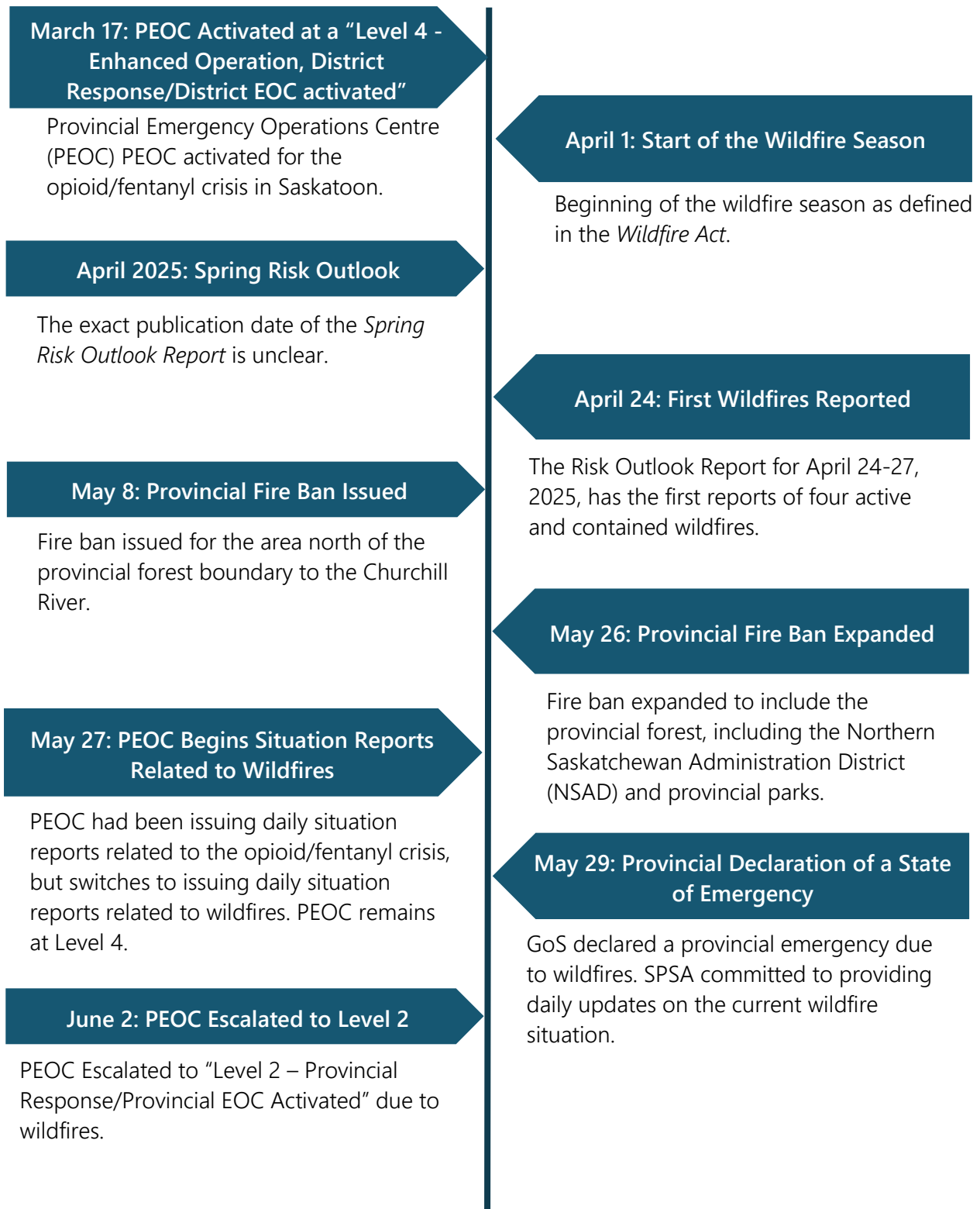
To support interpretation of the timeline, it is important to understand elements outlined in SPSA’s *PEOC Activation Policy and Procedures* (Policy PECO 1.0) that are used to monitor emergencies.

**Table 5: Understanding the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre**

<p><b>What is the PEOC?</b></p>	<p>The purpose of the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) is to provide a forum for information sharing, discussion, and decision-making at a strategic operational level. The PEOC is responsible for ensuring that multi-agency concerns and actions are coordinated at this level. The PEOC also coordinates with both municipal and federal partners on matters pertaining to their areas of expertise. The PEOC provides overall coordination of the provincial response based on the strategic direction of the President of the SPSA, the Minister responsible for <i>The Emergency Planning Act</i>, and Cabinet.</p>
<p><b>What does it mean to “activate the PEOC”?</b></p>	<p>Activation: The formal initiation of PEOC services.</p>
<p><b>What are the activation levels of the PEOC?</b></p>	<p><b>Level 5</b> – Routine Operation, Local Response/Local or Municipal EOC activated  <b>Level 4</b> – Enhanced Operation, District Response/District EOC activated  <b>Level 3b</b> – Virtual Operation, Multi District Response (Key Ministries)/Pr-EOC activated  <b>Level 3a</b> – Full Operation, Multi District Response (All Ministries)/Pr-EOC activated  <b>Level 2</b> – Provincial Response/Provincial EOC activated  <b>Level 1</b> – National/International Response/Provincial EOC activated</p>
<p><b>What kind of reporting does the PEOC do?</b></p>	<p>The PEOC produces several reports for different audiences, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Situation Reports:</b> Daily updates of the situation that are distributed to Ministries, Crowns, and Agencies. It includes situational information, response, and actions.</li> <li>• <b>Risk Outlook Report:</b> A twice weekly 72-hour Risk Outlook report that highlights provincial situational awareness. The report is prepared to provide all SPSA staff, ministries, Crowns, agencies, emergency planning officers and external partners with a picture of the overall risk within the province.</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> Saskatchewan Provincial Emergency Management Report (2015); Saskatchewan State of Emergency Review Report (2015); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Conditions at Freeze-Up Report (2016, 2019, 2020, 2021); Saskatchewan Water Security Agency – Preliminary Runoff Outlook (2023, 2024, 2025); Government of Saskatchewan – History of Drought Impacts in Saskatchewan; Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Annual Report (2021–22, 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25); Natural Resources Canada — Canadian Wildland Fire Information System (CWFIS); National Wildland Fire Situation Report / Seasonal Summary (2025)

Figure 4: Administrative timeline of the 2025 Wildfires



### June 11: \$500 One-Time Payment Announced

Provincial government announced \$500 in one-time emergency payments to all residents in evacuated communities over the age of 18.

### June 27: PEOC Remains at Level 2

According to Situation Reports and the *Risk Outlook Report for June 26-Jun 29*, the PEOC remained at Level 2 due to wildfires.

### July 3-6: PEOC Escalated to Level 4

According to the *SPSA Risk Outlook Report for July 3-6*, the PEOC was escalated to a Level 4.

### July 12: Provincial Declaration of Emergency Expires

The provincial declaration of emergency expires.

### August 13: Provincial Fire Ban Lifted

Provincial fire ban lifted by SPSA.

### October 31 – End of Wildfire Season

End of the Saskatchewan wildfire season as defined in the *Wildfire Act*.

### June 7: Financial Assistance Increased Under ECS Program

Province increases the financial assistance under the Emergency and Community Support (ECS) program available to households from the previous maximum of \$100 per day up to a new maximum of \$200 per day.

### June 12: Provincial Declaration of a State of Emergency Extended

The SPSA rescinded the provincial fire ban due to rainfall and cooler weather.

### June 30-July 3: PEOC at Level 5

According to the *SPSA Risk Outlook Report for June 30-July 3*, the PEOC was deescalated to a Level 5 during this time.

### July 9: Provincial Fire Ban Issued

Provincial fire ban issued covering the area north of the provincial forest boundary up to the Churchill River.

### July 30: Wildfire Stabilization

The last of the several impacted communities in Northern Saskatchewan began re-entry, marking the start of wildfire season stabilization.

### August 25-28: PEOC at Level 5

According to the *SPSA Risk Outlook Report for August 25-28*, the PEOC was deescalated to a Level 5 during this time and remained that way until the end of the wildfire season.

## Spotlighting Three High Priority Wildfires During the 2025 Season

This section highlights the complexity of wildfire response and suppression, as well as the concurrent nature of high-intensity wildfire activity during the 2025 Wildfire Season. It provides high-level summaries of three key wildfires to illustrate prevailing conditions, fire behaviour, and key elements of the response. These spotlights are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive analyses, reflecting the scope of the Review and the availability of data.

MNP's development of the spotlights relied on the following data sources:

- Written reports (e.g., situation reports) and other summary level documentation.
- Interviews with select SPSA staff including with those who worked as protection officers, those who worked on a fire base, and those with select technical roles (e.g., pilots).
- Open-source information including news releases on fire activity and weather information.

The SHOE, WOLF, and PISEW fires were selected as representative cases, reflecting the severity of the wildfire season, including periods of intense fire behaviour and significant impacts on affected communities. Timelines for each fire are provided in Appendix B.

### SHOE FIRE - 25LF

**Background:** The SHOE Fire was discovered on May 7, 2025, likely initiated by human activity as per SPSA reports. Fire weather forecasts for the day indicated the potential for extreme fire behaviour, including the likelihood of a high-intensity, fast-moving wildfire with a low probability of containment. The initial report from the first responding fire crew indicated the fire was already approximately 15 hectares in size and exhibiting extreme fire behaviour upon arrival.

At the time of discovery, sustained wind speeds of approximately 26 km/h, with gusts reaching up to 53 km/h, combined with low relative humidity and seasonally dry fuel conditions, contributed to rapid fire growth. Within the first several hours, the fire expanded to well over 100 hectares. Strong and erratic winds drove fire spread in both northerly and southerly directions, significantly limiting the effectiveness of suppression efforts. By the morning of May 9, the fire was estimated to be approximately 9,000 hectares.

On May 26, the CAMP Fire, burning to the north, merged with the SHOE Fire. Following this convergence, the CAMP Fire was administratively combined with the SHOE Fire, and all subsequent operational actions and documentation were managed under the SHOE Fire incident. By July 13, the fire had grown to approximately 554,567 hectares. The final fire size is currently estimated at approximately 565,701 hectares. On August 14, the fire was identified as contained.

**Response:** Initial attack and sustained efforts throughout early summer were unsuccessful in containing the SHOE Fire. Despite having a significant proportion deployed personnel to suppress this fire (up to 20% of the Province's available personnel at one point), the SHOE Fire continued to grow. Additionally, the SPSA allocated international teams from the United States, and other provincial jurisdictions to the SHOE Fire.

Heavy equipment and specialized equipment were also mobilized to the SHOE Fire. This included heavy machinery to construct containment guards, and the deployment of advanced water delivery, high-tech sprinkler, and irrigation systems to protect at-risk communities and key infrastructure. Aerial support including tankers and helicopters were also deployed to support suppression efforts.

Widespread rainfall and cooler temperatures were key variables leading to the containment of the SHOE Fire by mid-August. The combination of precipitation with ongoing sustained fire suppression efforts aided the SPSA in securing the fire's perimeter and preventing further growth.

**Fire behaviour and impact:** The SHOE Fire exhibited high intensity and was described by seasoned wildfire suppression experts as one of the most volatile fires they personally had ever encountered. In specific instances, despite aerial assets dropping large volumes of water over a small area, there was no measurable effect, which indicates the intensity was well beyond the average fire behaviour experienced in the Province. With the total hectares burned, the SHOE fire accounted for approximately 20% of the 2.9 million hectares burned across the entire Province in 2025.

The SHOE Fire resulted in widespread impacts across multiple communities, affecting structures, transportation corridors, parks, and other natural and built values. Numerous cabins, buildings, and critical infrastructure were damaged or destroyed including SPSA operational facilities, and equipment. While detailed inventories of losses were not available, SPSA estimates indicate that more than half of the approximately 700 structures and 400 vehicles lost during the 2025 Wildfire Season are attributable to the SHOE Fire. The incident prompted evacuations in several communities and led to the declaration of a local state of emergency in the community of Candle Lake.

While no-GPS data were available to determine distances of embers travelled, residents, media, and SPSA Staff reported extreme spotting behaviour, including embers jumping firebreaks, natural barriers, and undermining suppression techniques by creating smaller spot fires ahead of the main front. This challenged overall response efforts.

According to Forsite's expert analysts, the extreme fire behaviour was primarily driven by limited spring precipitation and cumulative drought conditions from previous years, with high winds further accelerating fire spread toward affected communities. These prolonged drought-like conditions, frequently accompanied by low relative humidity and strong, shifting winds associated with cold front passages and atmospheric instability, supported ongoing high intensity fire activity.

## WOLF FIRE – 25 DB

**Background:** The WOLF Fire was identified on May 19, 2025. Initial ignition was reported approximately 30 km west of Denare Beach and was assessed to have been caused by a lightning strike based on SPSA reporting. By the evening of May 19, the fire was estimated to be approximately 43 hectares, with an additional 1.5-hectare fire identified adjacent to the main perimeter. Multiple smaller spot fires were also observed outside the primary fire area and required suppression efforts. By the end of May, SPSA situation reports indicated that the WOLF Fire had expanded to approximately 30,000 hectares.

On June 3, the WOLF Fire doubled in size to 71,000 hectares, aided by winds more than 70 km/h. By end of June, the WOLF Fire doubled again to between 130,000 and 160,000 hectares. Throughout July, the WOLF Fire was still active though the pace of expansion slowed significantly; by the end of July, SPSA reports indicated the peak fire size was reached, and fire activity began to stabilize. On August 13, the WOLF Fire was classified as contained. This was reversed on August 27 when the WOLF Fire was re-classified as not contained, due to hotspots.

**Response:** At the time of the WOLF Fire identification, SPSA resources were heavily committed to multiple new fire starts and ongoing suppression operations across the province. Despite strained resources, the SPSA mobilized an initial attack crew upon the fire being reported, deploying a three-person crew by helicopter. Air tankers and helicopters were deployed throughout the initial attack to support containment efforts. Despite fire danger increasing to high, crews and aviation resources were able to limit fire growth. In early June, sustained efforts shifted from initial suppression to focus on values protection and defending communities, infrastructure, and key structures.

As the WOLF Fire spread, it threatened communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and community firefighters, including those from the community of Denare Beach, Creighton, and Flin Flon, Manitoba, shouldered the primary responsibility of fighting structural fires. Indigenous fire personnel also provided support, including those from the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation and the Prince Albert Grand Council. Faced with the aggressive growth of the WOLF Fire during the early June period, community personnel were spread thin, trying to protect their community and neighbouring communities both in Saskatchewan and in Manitoba. SPSA reports and SPSA staff interviews noted there was insufficient personnel to deploy to support some communities to ensure adequate capacity to respond to this fire, as all personnel were already deployed to other regions to support other fire suppression efforts for communities facing a direct threat.

**Fire behaviour and impact:** When the WOLF Fire was first reported, fire danger for the day was forecast as Moderate. However, weather forecasts identified the potential for strong, gusty winds that could increase fire behaviour. Throughout the initial attack phase, reports indicated fire growth continued to spread and threaten key infrastructure including Highway 106 by the end of May. Additionally, near the end of May, the WOLF Fire was actively burning in forest stands that were affected by forestry infestations, resulting in significant fuel loading. These conditions, combined with strong winds and the dry fuels, resulted in more aggressive fire behaviour than typical behaviour without these conditions.

Of note, the SPSA's situation reports described that SPSA staff developed a fire growth projection for six days between May 28 to June 2 using the Prometheus Fire Model. This is one of several recognized fire growth models that are used in Canada for projecting how a wildfire may spread across a landscape. The projection indicated that the WOLF Fire would remain approximately 20 kilometres west of Denare Beach. However, the Prometheus Fire Model is not designed to produce reliable fire growth projections over a multi-day time horizon, and leading practice is to re-run the model daily using the most current fire perimeter data, updated weather forecasts, and other available manual inputs. Departing from typical practice, subsequent SPSA situation reports do not note whether the fire growth projection was re-run daily, and if additional inputs were utilized to improve modelling.

Ultimately, the SPSA's fire growth projection based on the model proved to be inaccurate, as it did not account for the passage of a cold front on June 1 and 2, which brought strong westerly winds that ultimately pushed the fire toward Denare Beach. On the evening of June 1 and continuing overnight, a passing cold front produced strong westerly winds that shifted the fire's movement eastward. Extreme fire behaviour, including long-range ember transport, resulted in multiple new fire ignitions on Missi Island. These fires exhibited a high rate of spread, increasing concern regarding potential impacts to the community of Denare Beach. Preliminary fire behaviour calculations indicated the WOLF Fire had the potential to reach Denare Beach on early morning on June 2. By evening on June 2, the fire was approximately seven kilometres from Denare Beach and estimated to be approximately 70,000 hectares in size.

By midday on June 2, fire activity on Missi Island resulted in ember transport across Amisk Lake onto a forested peninsula located west of Denare Beach. While no GPS data was available to confirm the distance traveled, community reports suggest the embers travelled between 3 km and 4 km (the approximate width of Amisk Lake where an ember may have travelled). SPSA reports indicate the ember travel was driven by winds of up to 70 km/h. Upon landing on the Denare Beach coastline, embers ignited multiple fires in dense forest fuels, which quickly exhibited extreme fire behaviour. Ember showers subsequently impacted Denare Beach, resulting in multiple structure and vessel fires in and around Angell's Marina.

Strong westerly winds, dry forest fuels, and insect-affected stands contributed to extreme fire behaviour and long-range spotting across Amisk Lake, leading to catastrophic impacts within Denare Beach. These impacts included the destruction of approximately 400 permanent residences in the region (with approximately half being in Denare Beach), approximately a dozen commercial and resort properties were either fully destroyed or partially damaged, and significantly damaged road surfaces on both Highway 106 and 167.

While several fuel management projects had been implemented in previous years, their effectiveness during the WOLF Fire could not be definitively determined. Limited data is available regarding fire behaviour as it interacted with these fuel-managed areas. As a result, it remains unclear whether the fuel treatments contributed to suppression effectiveness. A post-fire image of a fuel-managed area at the south end of Denare Beach suggests limited effectiveness, as coniferous fuels were fully consumed; however, deciduous vegetation appeared to remain largely intact.

## PISEW FIRE – 25LA

**Background:** The PISEW Fire was identified on May 21 when it was approximately 4 hectares. This was discovered at a time where Provincial personnel, assets, and resources were already deployed to several other regions to support other efforts as well. By midday on May 22, the fire had grown to an estimated 3,500 hectares. At this point, there was immediate evacuation of residents from Hall Lake and several surrounding smaller communities. The abundance of forest fuels conducive to extreme fire behaviour in the area of the PISEW Fire was noted, and conditions for rapid fire growth were being monitored.

In early June, the passage of a strong cold front brought sustained wind speeds of approximately 20–30 km/h, with gusts reaching up to 60 km/h. These conditions resulted in rapid fire spread in variable directions, ranging from northeast to southeast, over distances of approximately 15 to 20 kilometres. The fire continued to exhibit extreme fire behaviour during this period and began impacting additional communities, including the towns of Air Ronge and La Ronge. This resulted in large-scale evacuations and damage to critical infrastructure and other values. At this time, SPSA reports indicated the fire was approximately 71,000 hectares.

At the end of June, the SPSA reported the PISEW Fire was 30% contained and was approximately 185,000 hectares in size. On August 16, the SPSA reported the PISEW fire was contained at a size of 220,000 hectares.

**Response:** Initial attack on the PISEW fire included ground crews, heavy machinery, and skimmers. Ground crews used assets including dozers in an attempt to secure various flanks. Skimmers also attempted to extinguish fires but were very quickly unable to operate due to heavy smoke. The dry, mixed-wood fuel, including conifers combined with high winds created extremely volatile conditions.

Like the SHOE Fire, sustained efforts on the PISEW fire shifted toward a focus on community defense. This included utilizing type 1, 2, and 3 firefighters, helicopter support, air tanker support, heavy equipment, and out of province support. Because the fire remained within 20 km of 17 different communities and key infrastructure, the SPSA organized one of the largest sprinkler and irrigation set-ups of the season for values protection. This included dedicated crews patrolling critical infrastructure for SaskPower, SaskTel, and SaskEnergy. Structural defense units were deployed to high-risk communities including Hall Lake, Napatak, and Sucker River. The SPSA's mobilization of a multi-agency force to suppress also included Indigenous personnel deployed from Indigenous communities and community fire personnel. Some communities utilized their own private heavy machinery and private assets to protect community structures.

**Fire behaviour and impact:** Initial SPSA reports noted the PISEW Fire would be challenging to suppress as it exhibited aggressive fire behaviour early. Throughout initial attack, while the fire was around 700 hectares in size, there were instances where crew members noted suppression efforts were unlikely to be successful due to the extreme fire behaviour. Early ground suppression efforts at the head of the fire were not effective as the wind direction continued to shift throughout this

period, changing the direction of the main fire front. Dense smoke challenged aerial support and complicated mapping the exact fire size, especially during the initial attack period.

Like the SHOE Fire, fire behaviour analysts noted the PISEW Fire behaved extremely aggressively, exhibiting “monster” behaviour. The primary driver for this behaviour was due to the persistent drought, very little rain during the spring, and low moisture content in forest fuels. The combination of these factors including consecutive days where the temperature exceeded 30°C, with low relative humidity led to extremely dry fuel that was available for ignition and combustion.

Additionally, fire suppression efforts were significantly hampered by high winds that resulted in a fast rate of spread, including fire burning through treetops. These winds also created situations of extreme spotting, where embers would be carried for great distances. Although there is no official documentation of ember travel distances due to the absence of GPS data, anecdotal reports suggest that embers were transported up to 15 km ahead of the main fire front. In some cases, embers were reported to land beyond active fire suppression areas, creating a potential risk of fireline entrapment.

Due to the proximity of this fire with communities, the WUI efforts were a key component of the PISEW Fire response. The fire approached communities threatening infrastructure such as the La Ronge Airport, downtown La Ronge, and subdivisions in Sucker River. Reports indicate several structures were lost. This led the SPSA to deploy high-volume sprinkler units to create humidity zones to protect communities.

Community evacuations ranged throughout the summer period. At the height of the fire activity in early June, more than 7,000 individuals representing approximately 15 communities were evacuated. This included the tri-community area of La Ronge, Air Ronge, and Lac La Ronge Indian Band; Northern Communities of Sucker River, Hall Lake, and Sikachu; and several Resort Subdivisions including Wadin Bay, Eagle Point, Potato Lake, Lamp Lake, Rabbit Creek, and Napatak. Numerically, the PISEW Fire contributed to the most evacuations, representing just under half of the total 16,000 Canadian Red Cross Evacuees.



## 2.0 Key Findings: Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation

Wildfire prevention and mitigation planning aims to eliminate or reduce the ignition and severity of wildfires on life, property, and the environment. Activities can include fire bans, fuel reduction, and implementing other FireSmart disciplines.

The guiding review question for this area was: ***To what extent did wildfire prevention and mitigation activities take place in Saskatchewan in the years leading up to the 2025 Saskatchewan Wildfire Event as compared to the SPSA’s fire management plans and requirements?***

**Review Finding Summary:**



**Significant Gaps**

SPSA’s prevention and mitigation activities align with the 2017 *Prairie Resilience Strategy and Climate Resilience Measurement Framework*, which includes a provincial target to treat 2,464 hectares of Crown land near communities by 2028. The analysis completed for this Review indicates that although progress is being made, it is not clear how the target was established nor does the target appear to be grounded in an assessment of accumulated wildfire risk or fire science. The analysis found that as a result reported progress toward the target does not align with the scale or complexity of community-level mitigation needs or broader landscape-level wildfire risk. Evolving climate conditions and recent fire seasons further indicate the need to reassess current fuel mitigation targets to ensure effective risk reduction.

Additional challenges have been identified in program delivery and coordination. While the mitigation team is fully staffed at four members, its current capacity may not align with the scale of required activities, a concern also reflected by internal interestholders, who indicated a need for additional personnel resources. Coordination between SPSA and the Ministry of Environment’s Forestry Branch an established foundation for collaboration in wildfire preparedness, with opportunities to further strengthen alignment toward a more integrated, all-of-government approach to forest management and wildfire prevention.

## Wildfire Fuel Mitigation Targets and Treatments Should be Strengthened

Wildfire mitigation projects have been occurring annually in Saskatchewan since 1999 under the Ministry of Environment, and now under SPSA. Under the *SPSA Act*, the SPSA is responsible for wildfire management, including wildfire mitigation activities.

Saskatchewan’s 2017 *Prairie Resilience Strategy and Climate Resilience Measurement Framework* is the all-of-government approach to environmental protection and sustainability and includes a provincial target of treating 2,464 hectares of Saskatchewan Crown land within and adjacent to communities by 2028. Since 2019, this work has been delegated to the SPSA according to their mandate under the *SPSA Act*. Through provincial and federal funding, this work is completed in collaboration with SaskPower, the Ministry of Government Relations, and Northern Municipal Services. Internal and external interestholders indicated that it is not clear how or if SPSA coordinates with the Ministry of Environment Forestry Branch related to organize or conduct wildfire mitigation projects in the forest.

The SPSA’s 2024–25 Annual Report indicates that, during the 2024–25 period, 21 community wildfire mitigation projects were completed. These included one municipal project with the City of Prince Albert, nine projects completed by SaskPower, and 11 projects undertaken by Northern Municipal Services. The annual report also notes that fuel mitigation work was completed on 359.8ha of Crown land adjacent to communities in 2024-2025. It also outlines the year-over-year cumulative total of Crown land that has been treated since 2020 towards the 2028 target, which as of 2025 was 1,463ha, or 59% of the 2028 goal.

**Table 6: Cumulative total of SK Crown land with wildfire fuel management work completed each year<sup>22</sup>**

Date	Cumulative Total Crown land with wildfire fuel management work completed
As of March 31, 2020	87ha
As of March 31, 2021	242ha
As of March 31, 2022	518ha
As of March 31, 2023	834ha
As of March 31, 2024	1,103ha
As of March 31, 2025	1,463ha
Goal for March 1, 2028	2,464 ha

<sup>22</sup> SPSA. March 31, 2025. “Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency 2024-25 Annual Report.” <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/126784>

Based on the assessment conducted for this Review, it is not clear how the fuel mitigation target was established, or if it was grounded in an assessment of accumulated wildfire risk or wildfire science. As a result, reported levels of fuel treatment since 2020 appear limited relative to the scale and complexity of community-level wildfire mitigation project requirements and broader landscape-level wildfire risk. As noted in Section 1, evolving climate conditions and recent wildfire seasons further underscore the need to reassess current fuel mitigation targets to ensure alignment with effective risk-reduction objectives, and to establish a monitoring framework that systematically identifies and accounts for accumulating wildfire risk over time.

Guiding the fuel mitigation work are community fuel management plans, which are proactive, strategic plans that outlines actions to reduce wildfire risk by managing vegetation (forest fuel) around residential areas. For this Review, 209 community fuel management plans from 2015 to 2025 were reviewed. These plans use a template, which is largely administrative, that focuses on objectives, areas, and engagement processes, while providing minimal information on fuel management prescriptions, mitigation tactics, or activities. SPSA Staff noted that the templates being used were up to eight years old and ultimately do not reflect current fire behaviour science. The SPSA indicated that the template was developed to keep the process concise and facilitate the completion of projects in a timely manner.

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*"We're still using templates from 2018; these [templates] don't reflect current fire behaviour science."*

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*-SPSA staff*

It is not clear from the plans or other tracking systems how or if the activities outlined in the plans were completed. Activities identified in the plans are narrowly focused on thinning, pruning, harvesting, and mulching, with limited prescriptive guidance or post-treatment monitoring requirements. SPSA has indicated they are participating in a pilot project with FireSmart Canada to develop a Candle Lake Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This pilot project intends to deploy a usable template to other communities across the province and nationally.

## Coordination and Collaboration with External Partners is Limited, Impacting Prevention Efforts and Risk Assessments

Prior to the amalgamation into the SPSA in 2019, the wildfire prevention and mitigation program was a part of the Wildfire Management Branch in the Ministry of Environment. Since the SPSA took over this function, internal and external interestholders suggested that the coordination between the Ministry of Environment's Forestry Management Branch and the SPSA's prevention and mitigation program could be strengthened.

SPSA submits fuel management plans annually to the Forest Service Branch through an Annual Operating Plan to obtain forest product permits required to conduct work on Crown land. Prior to 2024, dues associated with these projects were waived by the Forest Service Branch.

Interestholders reported that the Forestry Management Branch does not consistently recognize the relationship between fuel mitigation activities and forest protection objectives. They further noted that, beginning in 2024, SPSA is required to pay dues and fees for trees removed as part of mitigation work.

An integrated forest and wildfire management plan is important because forests and wildfire are not separate systems; they directly influence and shape one another. Coordinated planning enables more effective management of wildfire risk, ecosystem health, and public safety.

“The Crown, other than a Crown Corporation, is exempt from the requirement to pay the dues and fees required by the *Act* and these regulations.”

- *The Forest Resources Management Regulation (1999)* (last amended 2020)

SPSA staff and external interestholders identified a gap in how SPSA collaborates with the GoS and external partners to access and integrate data used to assess values at risk. SPSA requires property owners with land located within a provincial forest or within 4.5 km of a provincial boundary to register their property with the Agency. However, interestholders noted that properties or businesses are often already registered with the Ministry of Environment, suggesting uncertainty about how, or whether, GoS ministries and agencies coordinate and share information.

SPSA and the Forestry Management Branch collaborate to review Forest Industry Operating Plans to identify areas of concern and opportunities to coordinate efforts to reduce wildfire risk to communities. Forest industry interestholders also indicated that they worked with SPSA to develop new standards for wildfire prevention and preparedness plans, as documented in SPSA’s 2024–25 Annual Report.

As a result of these plans, forest industry interestholders reported a willingness to contribute to community protection activities. At the same time, they also noted that previous offers of support were frequently left unanswered and that long-standing partnerships in wildfire management have deteriorated as a result. SPSA staff and forestry industry interestholders further indicated that information provided by forestry partners, including management plans, values-at-risk data, and equipment inventories, has not been consistently catalogued or incorporated into preparedness planning. This has limited opportunities to integrate technical expertise and local knowledge into risk-informed planning processes.

## There is Opportunity to Increase Staff Capacity to Support Mitigation Programs

The SPSA's prevention and mitigation program falls under the Logistics and Support Services Branch. According to the October 2025 organizational chart,<sup>23</sup> the team includes the following roles:

- 1 Fire Science Specialist;
- 1 Situational Awareness Coordinator;
- 2 Wildfire Detection Technicians;
- 1 Fire Science Modeller;
- 2 Meteorologists; and,
- 4 Wildfire Mitigation Specialists.

The SPSA indicated that the Logistics and Support Services Branch was fully staffed prior to the 2025 Wildfire Season.

A review of organizational charts and training materials indicates that, while the Mitigation Unit was fully staffed with four individuals, current staffing levels are insufficient to manage the scale of identified wildfire mitigation activities. This observation was reinforced by internal interestholders, who indicated a need for additional team members to meet workload demands.

Additionally, internal interestholders noted that prevention and mitigation personnel are reassigned into response roles each spring, including in 2025. As a result, planned activities such as supervising fuel-treatment contractors, completing hazard-reduction projects, and maintaining mitigation maps are frequently stalled or left incomplete. Information provided to MNP indicated that frontline operations roles are usually reassigned for two or more weeks at a time, and there is limited evidence that these roles are backfilled while employees are on the frontline.

The Mitigation Unit within the Logistics and Support Services Branch is accountable for the planning, preparation, consultation and contracting for fuel mitigation projects. The plans are provided to Protection Officers to supervise the project. Interestholders described that while this helps to manage workload and allows for local knowledge from the Protection Officers, it has left gaps in the tracking and ownership of the completed work.

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<sup>23</sup> SPSA. October, 2025. "Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Organizational Chart." [PDF Report]

## Emergency Service Officers are Critical Liaisons to Communities

According to the *SPSA Act*, one of SPSA's roles is to "work with the Government of Canada, the government of any other province or territory of Canada, municipalities, Indigenous peoples, industry, the government of any other country or any jurisdiction within that country, and any other persons involved or associated with the objects and purpose of SPSA." SPSA's Emergency Services Officers (ESOs) team supports this mandate by:<sup>24</sup>

- Working directly with municipalities, First Nations, local officials, volunteers, and emergency responders to help communities assess hazards, develop emergency plans, and build resilience before an incident occurs.
- Facilitating workshops and training on emergency management, plan development, and operations centres.
- Coordinating support and response from government departments and service organizations during disasters.
- Educating and promoting FireSmart principles in communities.

A strong relationship between the ESO team and communities allows for many benefits. ESOs can work with municipalities and Indigenous communities to implement FireSmart programming which supports wildfire prevention and mitigation. Documentation provided to MNP indicates that between 2023 and 2025, ESOs participated in 63 community FireSmart activities, including FireSmart assessments and community Fire Prep Days. Communities utilizing FireSmart practices have seen situations where thinning trees, debris clean ups, and vegetation management have resulted in lower intensity fires, thereby allowing community firefighters to work more effectively.

Additionally, ESOs can work with communities to support various wildfire preparedness initiatives including helping to develop a community's emergency and evacuation plans, providing information about fire bans, and hosting workshops to help a community better understand its risks. ESOs are the SPSA's key liaisons to support emergency and wildfire management at the community level and play a critical role in maintaining the SPSA's awareness in relation to community preparedness and capacity.

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<sup>24</sup> SPSA. N.d. "Emergency Services Officers (ESO) and Support to Communities." <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/121425>



### 3.0 Key Findings: Wildfire and Emergency Preparedness

Emergency response and wildfire preparedness is the proactive process to plan, train, and position resources effectively to respond to an incident. Activities can include understanding risks and hazards, developing plans, procedures, and governance structures for a response, and training and educating staff.

The guiding review question for this area was: ***To what extent was the SPSA ready and prepared for a wildfire incident in Saskatchewan?***

**Review Finding Summary:**



**Significant Gaps**

While the SPSA had some foundational planning and structures, it was not fully prepared for a wildfire season of the scale and complexity seen in 2025. The establishment of the SPSA as a joint emergency management and wildfire operations agency does not appear to have been supported by an effective rollout or implementation framework, negatively impacting the consistency and effectiveness of the province’s wildfire and emergency management program.

Legacy systems, unclear and overlapping mandates across multiple pieces of legislation, and siloed operations persisted, resulting in uncertainty among staff regarding roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Internal policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were in place; however, they were difficult to access, inconsistently applied, and often outdated.

In addition, through engagement activities and responses to the internal survey, SPSA staff indicated that the Agency had not hosted a formal, internal emergency tabletop exercise prior to the 2025 Wildfire Season. Such exercises are commonly used by emergency management agencies to support improved coordination and communication in advance of an incident.

The lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities created operational confusion during preparedness activities. Preparedness was further limited by insufficient pre-season planning, including delayed recruitment, training, and equipment procurement.

## There Are Signs of Post-Amalgamation Integration Gaps

The multiple mandates of SPSA as a joint emergency management, wildfire management, and emergency dispatch agency are unique across Canada. Other jurisdictions reviewed for this project, Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, have separate and distinct organizations for wildfire services and provincial emergency management. These organizations are part of government ministries and are not Crown Corporations. Instead, in these provinces, legislation, regulation, and policies require the government departments to work collaboratively.

As described, the responsibilities of the SPSA are outlined in multiple pieces of legislation and regulations. The mandate of the SPSA was expanded in 2019 via the *SPSA Act*, when the GoS merged the Wildfire Management Branch from the Ministry of Environment and the Emergency Management and the Fire Safety Programs from the Ministry of Government Relations.

Under the *Emergency Planning Act*, Saskatchewan Emergency Planning was to be continued as a unit of SPSA to be known as the “Saskatchewan Emergency Management Organization” and gives power to the Minister to “designate an employee of SPSA as the chief of emergency management.” Based on the documentation provided for this Review, it is not evident that this function or role has been established within the Agency. The Minister delegated this role to the SPSA President on June 5, 2025, during the Wildfire season. Consideration could be given to establishing this role on a permanent basis, rather than on an emergency, or event specific basis.

Although the SPSA’s mandate is defined in legislation, internal and external interestholders do not share a consistent understanding of that mandate. Differences in how SPSA staff, Government of Saskatchewan partners, industry interestholders, and local authority representatives interpret the organization’s role influence how work is carried out. For example, SPSA staff are not aligned on the definition of “all-hazards” and view the organization as primarily wildfire focused. It is unclear to SPSA staff, GoS, and industry who the “public” is in the definition of “public safety” and if industry is included. Similarly, many local authorities were unclear about the role of the SPSA in preparing for and planning emergency management and evacuations.

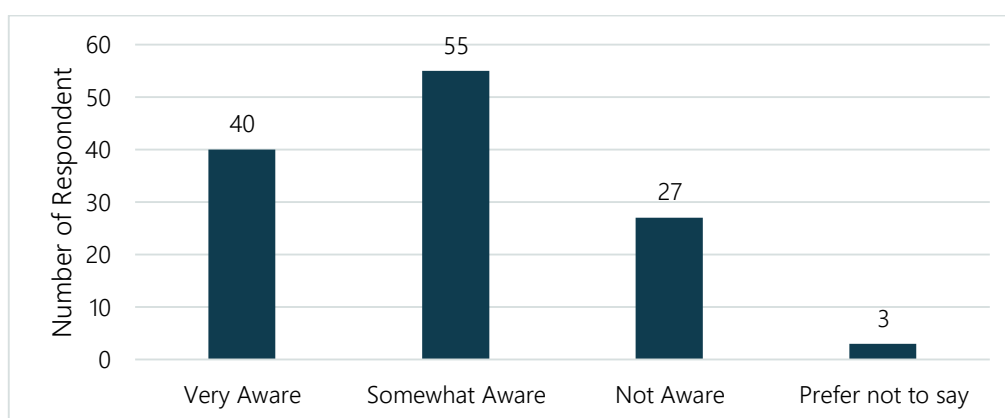
Interestholders described a shift in how work was carried out following the amalgamation of the Wildfire Management Branch, Emergency Management, and Fire Safety Programs into the SPSA. Interestholders described that prior to the amalgamation, a culture of camaraderie amongst team members and across functional units, with team members willingly volunteering to support as required.

Following the amalgamation, SPSA staff noted that this team-oriented culture diminished, with reduced enthusiasm and willingness to support surge capacity needs. SPSA staff described how this shift has contributed to the formation of silos, an incomplete integration of governance policies and procedures, and limited progress toward unifying organizational culture. These ongoing issues have led to organizational silos hindering information flow and coordination. Although efforts have been made to align technology systems, processes, and organizational frameworks, overlapping legacy processes, leadership hierarchies, and job definitions often lead to redundancies and ambiguity in roles and responsibilities.

## Challenges in Accessing and Following Internal Policies and Procedures

Saskatchewan has an established emergency management framework, including legislation and regulations that guide SPSA's work. Within this framework, the PEMP outlines how an all-of-government approach to emergency management is intended to function. At the same time, engagement findings suggest that these guiding documents were not consistently referenced or well understood by internal staff. The internal staff survey revealed that 31% (n=40) of respondents were very aware of the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan*, while 43% (n=55) described themselves as somewhat aware the plan, and 21% (n=27) as unaware (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: SPSA Staff Survey: Awareness of Saskatchewan's Provincial Emergency Management Plan before the 2025 Wildfire Season (n=125)**



In the SPSA *Strategic Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28*<sup>25</sup>, the SPSA notes their goal to "continue to work towards the establishment of a framework to support GoS, Crown Corporations, agencies, and ministries to develop emergency plans and business continuity plans." This goal is intended to focus on SPSA's relationship with the GoS and the Agency's responsibility under the *Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency* to support the whole of government emergency preparedness. SPSA's *Annual Report 2024-25* does not indicate any progress towards this goal.

Internally, the SPSA maintains a wide range of internal protocols and SOPs that were provided for review, including those covering topics such as:

- Duty periods
- Fire Control Agreements
- Priorities and Protection of Values and Property
- High Risk Fire Suppression
- Personnel Conduct

<sup>25</sup> SPSA. N.D. "Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Strategic Plan 2024-25 to 2027-28." [PDF Report]

Despite several internal-to-SPSA SOPs and guidelines, SPSA staff reported gaps and ongoing challenges in accessing the information they need. The absence of clear SOPs, particularly around surge staffing, integration of external crews, contractor management, and ICS transitions, contributed to operational confusion and increased reliance on informal workarounds.<sup>26</sup> SPSA staff also noted difficulty locating key documents on SharePoint, leading to delays and increased reliance on informal networks for information.

Where policy and procedural documents were able to be located, SPSA staff reported varying levels of clarity and consistency in how these internal documents were understood, and with some internal policies being inconsistently distributed and not always followed. These challenges were compounded by job descriptions that lack clarity and do not accurately reflect the scope of employees' roles and responsibilities. Many job descriptions were outdated or overly generic, resulting in limited alignment with the duties performed by staff. This has contributed to uncertainty around reporting lines, expectations, and accountability, deepening the disconnect between units and undermining efforts to establish a cohesive, all-of-government approach to emergency management.

SPSA staff also noted uncertainty regarding escalation pathways and decision-making authority, which at times led to inconsistent or delayed direction. Competing priorities, jurisdictional complexities, and varying interpretations of organizational roles further complicated coordination with external partners. Collectively, these structural gaps reduced clarity, hindered operational predictability, and constrained alignment across divisions during readiness activities.

## Additional Planning Should Take Place Prior to the Wildfire Season

The *Wildfire Act* defines the Saskatchewan wildfire season as starting April 1. Before wildfire season, leading practice for wildfire management teams normally focus on understanding and reducing risk while preparing for rapid response. This includes assessing high-risk areas, updating emergency and evacuation plans, and reducing available fuel through controlled burns, vegetation clearing, and community FireSmart practices. Additional activities also include inspections and pre-positioning of equipment, securing water access, ensuring firefighters are fully trained and staffed for the season, coordinating plans across agencies, and preparing clear communication strategies for the public. Altogether, these efforts ensure that when a wildfire starts, it can be detected quickly, managed efficiently, and kept from causing widespread damage.

SPSA entered the 2025 Wildfire Season without a clearly articulated, system-level preparedness posture aligned with pre-season risk indicators. SPSA's Spring Risk Outlook identified moderate drought risk across most of the province and high-risk conditions in the northeast and southwest due to dry fall 2024 conditions. While these conditions did not guarantee an extreme fire season, expert analysis indicated the need for early completion of preparedness activities and increased wildfire response capacity relative to an average season. While certain operational units

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<sup>26</sup> MNP notes several requested policies, procedures, and other key documents could not be provided in a finalized form; this resulted in challenges with validating interestholder feedback.

demonstrated readiness within their functional areas, pre-season planning was not consistently documented, integrated, or exercised across wildfire operations, emergency management, coordination, and surge capacity. As a result, SPSA entered the 2025 season without a clearly articulated, system-level preparedness posture aligned to the scale and complexity of anticipated wildfire conditions.

## Utilizing Preseason Situational Awareness for Preparedness

Preseason situational awareness is the proactive, ongoing process of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence before an incident occurs. It involves developing an understanding of risk, environmental conditions, and resource capabilities to anticipate requirements, reduce vulnerabilities, and inform potential response decisions.

The SPSA indicated that updated basemaps now include a fuel layer that is refreshed annually and incorporates burns from the previous fire season as well as other Saskatchewan-specific updates, whereas, pre-2025 basemaps may not have included annually updated fuel layers. Additionally, weather mapping and information are now updated up to four times daily during an incident, with hourly weather data available online from weather stations across the province, whereas prior weather mapping and information updates were not as frequent. Despite basemaps and weather mapping improvements, some SPSA staff and industry interestholders reported continued reliance on values-at-risk maps developed in 2018 or earlier, which do not reflect more recent vegetation changes or climate-related risk factors.

Staffing-wise, organizational charts show that the SPSA employs one Fire Science Specialist, one Fire Science Modeller, two Intelligence Officers, and two Wildfire Detection Technicians within its Operations Division. Despite having this technical expertise in-house, some SPSA staff have indicated that their expertise was not consistently integrated into decision-making. SPSA staff noted modelling outputs were often siloed and not shared across teams, which resulted in a reactive approach to resource repositioning. Additionally, SPSA staff also observed equipment, and personnel were often deployed only after fire activity intensified, leaving high-risk communities without timely support.

## Recruitment, Recall, and Training

SPSA staff include full-time, year-round employees as well as seasonal personnel engaged on a temporary basis during the hazard season. Seasonal staffing includes both newly recruited individuals and returning staff who may be re-engaged in their previous roles.

For this Review, wildfire behaviour expert analysis<sup>27</sup> of the *Spring Risk Outlook Report* concludes that the conditions in the 2025 report did not guarantee an extreme fire season. However, the information identified a need for all early pre-season activities such as training, preparedness

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<sup>27</sup> "Expert analysis", when used in this section, refers to Forsite, MNP's subcontracted technical experts in forest management, wildfire behaviour analysis, and wildfire science.

planning, and staffing to be conducted and concluded prior to snow melt.<sup>28</sup> Wildfire behaviour expert analysis indicates, based on the pre-season conditions, the SPSA needed more staff dedicated to wildfire response in 2025 versus an average fire season.

While SPSA has confirmed that recruitment for the 2025 Wildfire Season began in January 2025, there is limited evidence that preseason situational awareness, including environmental conditions and resource capabilities, was used to inform capacity planning and start dates for seasonal staff recruitment and training, especially during the “wildfire off-season.”

In March 2025, the SPSA held a pre-wildfire season meeting attended only by permanent staff. Seasonal personnel, who carried out most frontline wildfire response, did not begin their contracts until April, meaning they missed key early-season updates, policy briefings, and planning discussions. In 2025, the recall of seasonal firefighters, onboarding of new staff, and training activities did not begin until April 5, after the official start of the wildfire season on April 1.

Training for permanent and seasonal staff began in early April. SPSA staff noted that this timing overlapped with the start of fire activity, reported on April 24, 2025<sup>29</sup> limiting participation because personnel were already deployed. Firefighters arriving mid-season without formal training were supervised directly in the field, creating information gaps and inconsistencies in protocols and operational alignment. The early start to the 2025 Wildfire Season further disrupted onboarding and training, with both documents and SPSA indicating that approximately 40% of planned sessions were cancelled. Although some training was offered later in the season, most seasonal staff had departed by August and were unable to participate.

Training records show that SPSA does not currently have a modern learning management system, relying instead on information that may not be fully up-to-date, along with training records that vary in consistency. This situation makes it more challenging for SPSA to monitor qualifications across all staff and contractor groups. Continued dependence on a small number of individuals may elevate operational risk.

SPSA staff are required to have, at a minimum, their ICS 100: Introduction to the Incident Command System training. However, SPSA staff described that in 2025, and previous seasons, ICS practices and operational safety training were not consistently embedded across SPSA staff assigned to response roles. While experienced personnel and training pathways were in place, staff described uneven levels of training, orientation, and role readiness, particularly in the early stages of incidents. As a result, some response roles were filled based on experience rather than consistent, role-specific qualification or orientation, creating variability in preparedness and operational safety during the 2025 Wildfire Season.

Overall, deficiencies in training and onboarding activities pose direct safety risks to all staff, inexperienced workers and those working with them.

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<sup>28</sup> MNP notes it did not review any specific standard operating procedure for pre-season recruitment, recall, and training; however, the SPSA appears to historically rely on environmental triggers to determine whether it commences pre-season activities early. For example, in 2024, the SPSA started these activities at least two weeks earlier than normal due to the environmental conditions it was seeing by April.

<sup>29</sup> According to an SPSA “Intelligence and Situational Awareness: Risk Outlook April 24-27, 2025.”

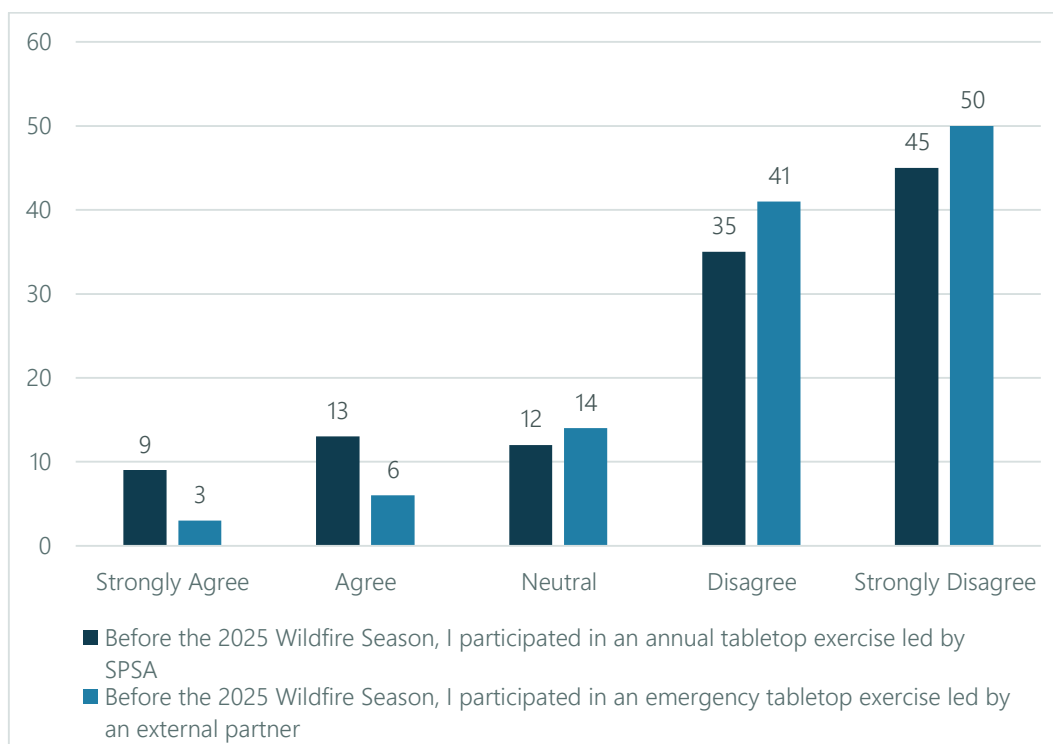
## Tabletop Exercises

An emergency tabletop exercise is a discussion-based training activity in which key personnel work through a simulated emergency scenario, such as a wildfire, flood, or public health crisis. For an all-hazards emergency management agency, regularly conducting tabletop exercises is considered a leading practice to support readiness and adapt to evolving risks. Best practice suggests holding these exercises at least annually, with more frequent sessions (e.g., semi-annually or quarterly) in high-risk jurisdictions or when new plans, personnel, or hazard profiles emerge.

It is a common practice to invite relevant external partners, such as police services, health agencies, local authorities etc. to join the exercise to better understand their roles and improve coordination. Rather than deploying resources in the field, participants talk through their roles, decision-making processes, and coordination strategies in a low-pressure environment. These exercises are important because they help identify gaps in plans, clarify responsibilities, and improve communication across agencies before a real incident occurs. They also build familiarity with emergency procedures and strengthen relationships among partners, which is critical for effective response during high stress situations.

Through interviews and focus groups, SPSA staff, including leaders, indicated that they had not participated in an emergency tabletop exercise. This was further highlighted through the results of the internal staff survey that shows most respondents have not participated in a tabletop exercise led by the SPSA or a partner (Figure 6). Although SPSA leadership indicated that some staff have participated in tabletop exercises, documentation provided for this Review did not include evidence of staff participation or a formalized internal SPSA tabletop exercise program. Specifically, there was no documentation demonstrating that such exercises had been held by SPSA for internal staff, nor evidence of established policies, procedures, or guidelines requiring regular internal tabletop exercises. In the absence of a consistent exercise program, there is an increased risk that operational challenges are identified during response rather than proactively addressed in advance.

Figure 6: SPSA Staff Survey: Staff who have participated in an emergency tabletop exercise (n=117)



## Surge Capacity in Emergency Management

Surge capacity planning in emergency management refers to the ability of a system to rapidly expand its personnel, resources, and coordination structures to meet a sudden increase in demand during a disaster or incident. This can include mobilizing additional staff and scaling up emergency operations centres and services. Effective emergency management surge capacity planning ensures that roles are clearly defined, resources can be mobilized efficiently, and coordination across agencies is maintained, ultimately helping to save lives, protect infrastructure, and reduce economic and environmental impacts. Jurisdictions such as Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba, have more recently developed programs where they can surge key emergency management roles in their provincial coordination centres through trained individuals across government ministries.

Based on the review of documents and interestholder engagement, in its role as the provincial emergency coordination agency, SPSA does not have a clear surge capacity program or business continuity plan for key emergency management roles in the organization. The SPSA has some elements of surge capacity capabilities, but these do not constitute a comprehensive agency-wide emergency management surge capacity plan.

- The PEMP includes elements that would allow SPSA to coordinate with other ministries and bring in support to the PEOC, the individuals do not have to be pre-trained in emergency management, PEOC operations, or SPSA procedures.

- SPSA has surge capacity capabilities for the Emergency Crisis Support (ECS) program, which consists of volunteers from within SPSA and the GoS who receive training in April and provide their availability via email requests every 2 weeks.
- SPSA does have mutual aid agreements with other provinces, international partners, and the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Center (CIFFC) to support wildfire management efforts in the event of constrained internal/provincial personnel. These agreements allow the SPSA to call on their partners to provide additional wildfire management resources such as trained personnel, equipment, and aerial resources.

Despite a willingness to support from across the GoS, SPSA leaders indicated that they rely on retirees and short-term contract staff to support logistics and response functions during major wildfire events, reflecting limited sustained internal capacity in these areas. This reliance reflects limited baseline capacity, not just temporary surge. Importantly, SPSA staff report this same workforce strategy has been reused across major events, suggesting a persistent structural pattern, not a one-time exception.

In the logistics area specifically, a portion of the workforce is either nearing retirement or already retired and returning on short-term contracts to address urgent vacancies. Persistent funding constraints for permanent FTE positions have led to critical roles going unfilled, resulting in heavier workloads for existing staff and a growing reliance on temporary, surge-based resourcing.

Staffing shortages, recruitment challenges, and difficulty retaining both specialized and seasonal personnel further reduced preparedness levels. SPSA staff noted challenges filling contractor and specialized roles and operational strain when the SPSA had to redeploy internal staff with minimal notice or onboarding.

Many SPSA staff interviewed, expressed a strong and continued commitment to the organization's success. Their connection to the work, and to the communities affected by operational challenges, reinforces a desire to see improvements sustained, even as they transition out of the workforce.

## Equipment Readiness and Procurement

The SPSA's Air Operations and Land Operations teams conduct equipment maintenance and repairs prior to the start of the 2025 Wildfire Season in alignment with internal SOPs and federal requirements.

SPSA had a vendor registry and notification systems in place; however, there is limited evidence that formal, pre-season contracts for heavy equipment and other emergency management services were consistently executed prior to the 2025 Wildfire Season. Internal and external interestholders similarly indicated that advance contracting for heavy equipment and emergency management services, such as transportation and accommodation providers, was limited. Forestry industry interestholders also noted that, while they were asked to submit equipment lists to SPSA and the Forest Management Branch, this equipment was not utilized during the 2025 Wildfire Season.

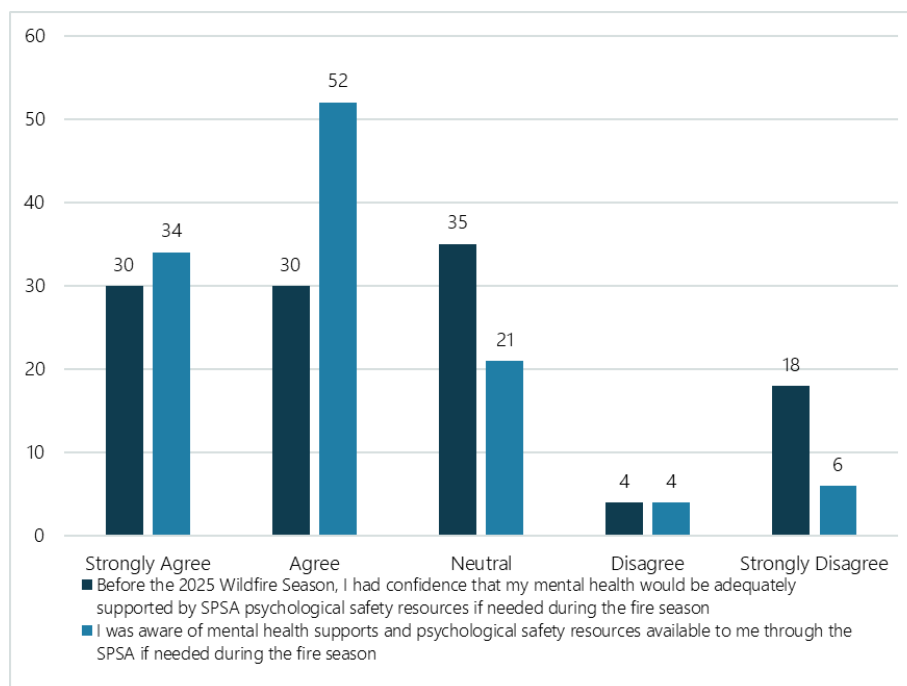
Procurement delays and late-season contracting limited SPSA's ability to secure resources when they were most needed. Interestholders identified lengthy procurement processes, inconsistent documentation, and a limited pool of pre-qualified vendors as key contributors to operational

delays. Equipment and resource planning was further complicated by inconsistent pre-season planning and limited surge capacity, which, according to interestholders, resulted in more reactive rather than strategic deployment. While staff consistently demonstrated strong commitment, interestholders noted that the overall availability of trained personnel and coordinated equipment resources did not fully support a state of preparedness.

## There was an Inconsistent Approach to Psychological Readiness and Scheduled Wellness Check-ins

A recurring theme across interviews and focus groups was the gap in systematic psychological readiness and support for all staff both before and during the 2025 Wildfire Season. SPSA staff who participated in engagement, and those who responded to the survey acknowledged that mental health and wellness supports were available and communicated (Figure 7). However, many SPSA staff indicated that psychological readiness and support were not consistently embedded or operationalized within the SPSA’s preparedness activities prior to deployment for wildfire response.

**Figure 7: SPSA Staff Survey: Staff awareness and perception of mental health resources prior to the 2025 Wildfire Season (n=118)**



SPSA staff described that rather than being integrated into pre-season planning, mental health supports tended to be informational and self-directed, with limited proactive measures to ensure staff were psychologically equipped for the demands of extended hours or remote field assignments. This lack of pre-emptive integration meant that personnel heading into the 2025 Wildfire Season were not systematically provided with structured opportunities to build psychological resilience, such as pre-season workshops, routine check-ins, or formal debriefing protocols. Staff shared that they experienced challenges in accessing supports in real time during

critical incidents, highlighting the need for preparedness-stage interventions that normalize and reinforce psychological safety through leadership behaviours, scheduled wellness check-ins, and protected time for mental health conversations.

The absence of a clear focus on workplace psychological safety during the preparedness phase discouraged help-seeking even before the operational period began and undermined the intended impact of available supports. Findings indicate that the SPSA did not routinely implement formal mechanisms, such as pre-season surveys, structured psychological risk assessments, or readiness self-assessments, to identify mental health needs in advance of deployment. As a result, psychological risks were often only addressed reactively, rather than as part of a comprehensive preparedness strategy.

SPSA staff further highlighted that there was no organization-wide psychosocial program in place during the preparedness stage to systematically identify psychological hazards, such as anticipated exposure to traumatic events, fatigue, or moral injury, and to pair those risks with tangible controls. Such controls could include staffing models that account for psychological load, planned rotation schedules to mitigate burnout, pre-season resilience training, and mandatory defusing or debriefing sessions as a standard element of readiness. Without these preparedness-driven processes, staff entered the 2025 Wildfire Season without a cohesive framework for psychosocial support, increasing vulnerability and reducing overall organizational resilience.

Additionally, while mental health supports such as Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), Public Safety Professional Network (PSPNET), and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) were available and communicated, staff reported concerns about confidentiality and trust in advance of deployment, which further limited the effectiveness of these resources in the preparedness effort. Addressing these trust barriers and embedding psychological safety into the pre-season readiness process would help ensure supports are both accessible and utilized, ultimately contributing to a safer and more resilient workforce as the SPSA prepares for future wildfire seasons.

## Community Preparedness Relied on the SPSA's Support

Local authorities are the primary responders to an emergency in their jurisdiction. Under the *EPA* and the *PEMP*, local authorities are expected to:

- Develop local emergency plans and set up an emergency measures organization, including appointing coordinators/committees.
- Coordinate local resources (police, fire, EMS) and escalate to the province if local capacity is insufficient.
- Direct and control local response efforts during emergencies, including evacuations.

SPSA is identified as Saskatchewan's emergency coordination agency and under the *EPA*, *PEMP*, and other legislation and regulation, are directed with providing programs and services to fire departments and emergency organizations and work with municipalities, plus First Nations and Métis organizations. If a provincial emergency is declared, SPSA is enabled to assume direction and control, including evacuation.

The SPSA provides guidance on requesting provincial assistance, offers training for community emergency planning committees, and shares leading practices for wildfire preparedness. These resources and templates are available online; however, interestholders emphasized that access to templates alone does not constitute comprehensive preparedness. SPSA staff and external interestholders noted that communities are seeking more hands-on support from the SPSA to effectively develop, implement, and maintain emergency preparedness plans.

Within SPSA, the ESO is a key staff role responsible for supporting local authorities, including municipalities and First Nations. According to the ESO job description and interestholder feedback, ESOs provide local expertise and are trained to assist communities before, during, and after an incident. ESOs do this by advising in the development, review and update of emergency plans and facilitate exercises to identify gaps. Local authority interestholders noted that while individual officers were dedicated and empathetic there was insufficient support from the ESO program, with ESOs overextended and some relatively new in their roles and lacking depth to provide support to impacted communities. SPSA staff similarly acknowledged that the ESO program was overextended and, at times, operated in silos and was deprioritized relative to other SPSA mandates.

Feedback from community and emergency management representatives' points to challenges in how the ESO role is implemented in practice, particularly regarding local familiarity and consistency. For example, respondents to the public survey who identified themselves as a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of an evacuated community expressed frustration with ESOs not knowing their local area, saying "it does no good having an ESO if they don't know their territory." A Director of Emergency Management (DEM) also noted the importance of "hav[ing] ESOs from the north who are familiar with the land", stemming from frustration of a lack of local expertise. Some interestholders did not know their assigned ESO, while others interacted with multiple ESOs at once, causing confusion without a standardized process. This was especially prominent within the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NSAD).

One of the areas where ESO's can provide the support is in the development of Community Preparedness Plans. The SPSA's *2024-25 Annual Report* tracks the number of at-risk northern

communities that have completed a wildfire Community Preparedness Plan (CPP), with a target to complete 82 plans for all 84 at-risk northern communities. As of March 31, 2025, 67 plans were completed, representing a 76% completion rate. While CPPs are the responsibility of communities (e.g., cities, towns, villages, rural municipalities), the SPSA provides support in the form of resources, templates, and subject matter expertise.

The SPSA tracks CPP progress because CPPs support community preparedness and the SPSA's ability to integrate local planning into provincial wildfire operations. Despite the high completion rate, both SPSA staff and interestholders indicated that CPPs were often unavailable, outdated, or unknown to incoming SPSA personnel, requiring responders to reconstruct tactical plans during active wildfire conditions.

Because CPPs rely on communities to complete them and vary widely in scope and quality, they do not consistently provide details on resource inventories, strategic protection priorities, or evacuation considerations. The absence of a clear SPSA process for maintaining, verifying, or supporting the updating CPPs reduces the likelihood that these documents can serve as an operational reference point, limiting their value during both preparedness and early suppression activities.

## Jurisdictional Spotlight: Managing Wildfire Response Across a Complex Northern Landscape

The Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (the “District”; NSAD) is a single incorporated municipality in northern Saskatchewan. The District includes all the unincorporated area in northern Saskatchewan and excludes incorporated towns, northern villages, northern hamlets and designated Park land. The District does include several named communities including 11 northern settlements, 14 resort subdivisions, and multiple northern cluster subdivisions as well as approximately 8,000 land leases and private titles.



### Governance

Northern Municipal Services (NMS) has the legislated responsibility to act as the local government authority for the District. NMS’s responsibilities are legislated through *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010*, to ensure residents of the District have access to consistent governance, services and support. This governance model differs from incorporated northern municipalities like towns, northern villages and northern hamlets which have their own mayor and council. The Minister of Government Relations acts as the council of the District, with NMS delegated to carry out municipal and operational decisions on behalf of the Minister.

### Emergency Management

NMS’s role in administering the District as a municipality, includes:

- Serving as municipal council, for all northern settlements, resort subdivisions, and other areas;
- Acting as the local authority for emergency management and response;
- Acting as the local emergency measures organization;
- Exercising the powers of a local authority under and emergency including issuing evacuation alerts and orders;
- Representing the District at the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC); and,
- Serving as a liaison between SPSA Land Operations, ESOs, other ministries, municipalities and First Nation communities, particularly in complex evacuations and re-entry situations.

### Jurisdictional Spotlight: continued

NMS works closely with neighbouring incorporated northern municipalities, First Nations, and provincial ministry jurisdictions (Parks, Environment, etc.) on many files including emergency management. Intergovernmental liaison work is a core function of NMS staff, who are recognized as partners, neighbours and effective pathfinders who help navigate provincial systems and coordinate responses. The District does not have its own municipal fire department because of its large size and the fact that most properties are remote Crown land recreation leases. In areas with subdivisions, like those around La Ronge, structural fire protection is provided through a Fire Services Agreement with the La Ronge fire department. The District also relies on SPSA for wildland fire response since most subdivisions are surrounded by provincial forest. Because local emergencies frequently affect multiple jurisdictions, and almost always include the District as the adjacent municipality, NMS often plays a mediating role, aligning communication, evacuations, and resource decisions among multiple local governments and the SPSA.

### The 2025 Wildfire Season

During the 2025 Wildfire Season events, the NSAD faced major coordination and operational challenges, beginning with unclear roles between the SPSA and ESOs that delayed or disrupted response actions. Confusion deepened in unorganized areas where residents asserted informal authority, creating jurisdictional uncertainty. Several affected communities received no evacuation orders, and uncertainty around provincial grant eligibility added frustration. Inconsistent official communication led residents to rely on Facebook for critical updates, including repatriation information. Response efforts were further strained by residents who refused or defied evacuation orders, sometimes indirectly supported with fuel or food from the SPSA, reinforcing non-compliance. Limited awareness of northern context and longstanding relationships contributed to repeated information loss and the SPSA's failure to leverage the NSAD as subject-matter experts. These challenges were amplified by a small team of 15 staff responsible for nearly half of Saskatchewan's landmass.

### Opportunities for the Future

- **Clarify roles and authorities** between SPSA, ESOs, and NMS in unincorporated areas, particularly for evacuation and re-entry decisions.
- **More intentionally integrate NMS** into wildfire planning, response, and recovery as a northern coordination partner and subject matter expert.
- **Strengthen communication approaches** for remote and unincorporated areas to ensure timely, consistent information for residents.
- **Improve alignment on evacuation and compliance practices** to reduce mixed messaging and support responder safety.
- **Assess options to strengthen surge capacity and coordination mechanisms** to support NSAD during large-scale or prolonged wildfire events



## 4.0 Key Findings: Wildfire and Emergency Response

Emergency management response is the coordinated actions taken by government agencies, first responders, and organizations to protect lives, property, and the environment during and immediately after disasters or emergencies. It includes activities such as warning the public, evacuations, search and rescue, medical care, sheltering, and coordination of resources.

Wildfire response is a specific type of emergency response focused on controlling and suppressing wildfires to reduce harm to people, property, and natural resources. It involves firefighting operations, evacuation planning, air and ground suppression tactics, and coordination among fire agencies and emergency management officials.

The guiding review question for this area was: ***To what extent did the SPSA’s wildfire and emergency response activities align with established procedures and was the response effective and appropriate in addressing the actual conditions and challenges of the 2025 Wildfire Season?***

**Review Finding Summary:**



**Limited Evidence**

There is limited evidence that the SPSA’s emergency and wildfire response aligned with established procedures, and in many areas the response did not meet the expectations set out in Saskatchewan’s emergency management framework.

Primarily, the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC), whose purpose is outlined in the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan* and internal policy, and which functions as the province’s central coordination hub, was activated but not operated as a fully functional coordination centre. The mandate and function of the PEOC was further confused by the SPSA’s operation of a Provincial Response Centre (PRC), resulting in limited tasking, uneven situational awareness, and inconsistent information flow. These gaps demonstrate that core elements of the province’s emergency management system were not effectively executed.

Although the SPSA had foundational structures, such as internal SOPs, the PEMP, and widely required ICS training, these were inconsistently applied and understood, or difficult for staff to access. Staff reported that internal policies were outdated, hard to find, or not followed, contributing to operational confusion and inconsistent decision-making during the response. Formal command structures were not implemented, and key emergency management principles, such as consistent use of ICS and clear role clarity, were not institutionalized across the organization.

## SPSA Staff Were Highly Motivated

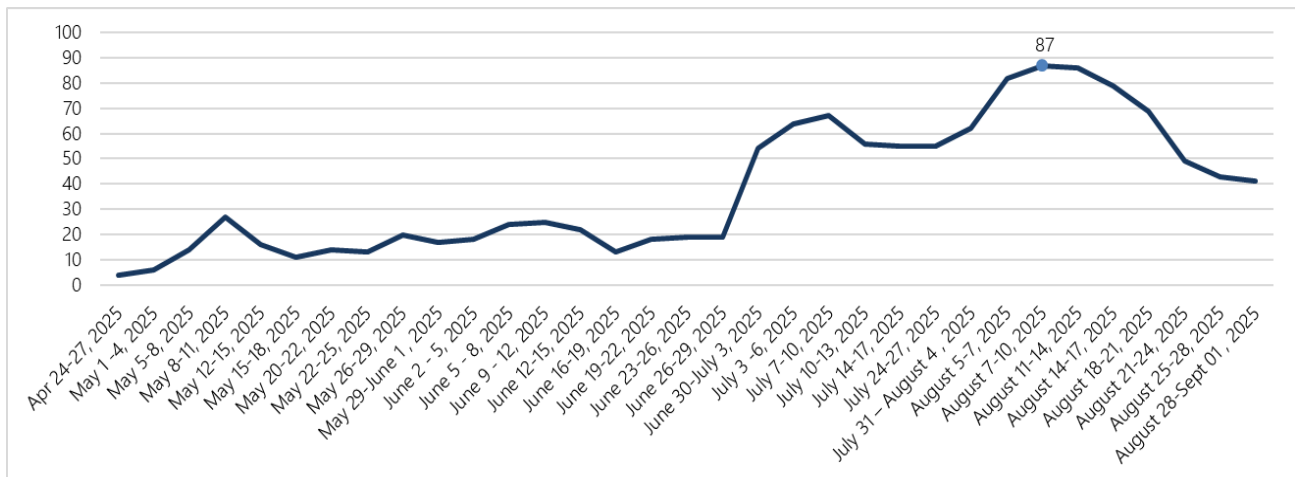
The 2025 Wildfire Season saw many SPSA staff step into multiple roles, work extra hours, and forfeit personal time. The dedication of many SPSA staff should be commended, with recognition for the high degree of motivation of each individual team member had to give their best. While the broader circumstances, including the environmental conditions and the Agency’s readiness, were challenging to operate within, SPSA staff retained a strong sense of duty, and commitment to supporting the public across the Province.

## Simultaneous Wildfire Ignitions Created Unprecedented Strain on SPSA Resources and Contributed to Coordination Challenges

Simultaneous wildfire ignitions created an operational environment that exceeded typical demands and placed unprecedented strain on SPSA resources. While preseason outlooks did not definitively predict an extreme season, they did indicate heightened ignition potential and the need for early readiness actions. Once fire activity accelerated, SPSA’s ability to deliver rapid, consistent initial attack was constrained by the reality of concurrent demand: trained personnel, aircraft, heavy equipment, and logistics capacity were required in multiple locations at the same time.

This strain was compounded by the scale of simultaneous fire activity. As shown in the figure below, Risk Outlook Reports tracked the cumulative number of active wildfires (including contained, not contained, under assessment, and those where SPSA was protecting values), with the 2025 peak showing 87 active fires during the August 7–10 period (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Total active fires in Saskatchewan April 24- Sept 1, 2025 (Source: SPSA Risk Outlook Reports)**



When many fires are active at once, provincial and system-wide coordination becomes as critical as on-the-ground suppression. Maintaining a common operating picture, tracking incident status changes, and communicating priorities across regions becomes markedly more complex, particularly when the same staff and systems are required to support both field operations and provincial coordination.

Inconsistent implementation of coordination structures, uneven information flow, and limited ability to consistently prioritize and task resources across incidents reduced the effectiveness of response efforts during critical windows. The combined effect was that operational decision-making, resource ordering, and situational awareness were more difficult to centralize and standardize at the pace required by a multi-incident environment. As further described in this section, the way response activities were coordinated influenced the pace at which some incidents escalated. While it is not possible to assess counterfactual outcomes, information summarized through the fire spotlights above suggests there were instances where earlier or more coordinated action may have reduced downstream impacts.

## It is Unclear if the PEOC was the Single Provincial Coordination Centre

As described, the purpose of the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) is outlined in the PEMP and the SPSA's "PEOC Activation Policy and Procedures." This policy describes that the PEOC's purpose is:

To provide a forum for information sharing, discussion, and decision-making at a strategic operational level. The PEOC is responsible for ensuring that multi-agency concerns and actions are coordinated at this level. The PEOC also coordinates with both municipal and federal stakeholders on matters pertaining to their areas of expertise.

The PEOC provides overall coordination of the provincial response based on the strategic direction of the President of the SPSA, the Minister responsible for *The Emergency Planning Act*, and Cabinet. (pg 1, PEOC Activation Policy and Procedures)

The policy is owned by the Executive Director, Logistics and Support Services, but the Director of Intelligence Services acts as the PEOC Director under a delegated authority from the SPSA President. The PEOC is in Regina, Saskatchewan. The policy notes that the PEOC includes:

- Coordinating provincial response and recovery
- Supporting operational decision-making
- Assigning critical provincial resources
- Ensuring consistent communications
- Producing situation reports
- Liaising with federal agencies
- Advising SPSA leadership on the response
- When activated, the PEOC must conduct:
  - Daily internal briefings (AM and PM)
  - PEOC command/general staff meetings
  - Provincial coordination calls with ministries and partners
  - Daily Situation (SIT) Reports

The PEOC Activation Policy does not outline what roles should be filled in the event the PEOC is activated. As such, it is unclear what positions were needed or filled during the 2025 Wildfire Season response.

PEOC situation reports were provided for review and indicate that the PEOC was activated to a Level 4 (Enhanced Operation, District Response/District EOC activated) on May 17, 2025, to support the response to the opioid/fentanyl epidemic in Saskatoon. From May 17-26, 2025, the PEOC situation reports focused on the opioid/fentanyl crisis. On May 27, 2025, the PEOC began preparing situation reports regarding active wildfires. The PEOC was escalated to a Level 2 (Provincial Response/Provincial EOC activated) on June 2, 2025, and remained as such until June 30, 2025, when it was deescalated to a Level 5 (Routine Operation, Local Response/Local or Municipal EOC activated). The PEOC was again escalated to a Level 4 from July 3–August 25, which it was deescalated to Level 5.

In addition to the situation reports, which are a critical component of the ICS and leading practice in provincial coordination centres across jurisdictions, the SPSA Intelligence and Situational Awareness Team provides Risk Outlook Reports. These reports are described in the PEOC policy as “A twice weekly 72-hour Risk Outlook report that highlights provincial situational awareness.” These reports are not produced on PEOC letterhead but contain similar, and in some cases additional information, to the situation report.

In addition to the PEOC, the SPSA also operates the Provincial Response Centre (PRC), located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The role of the PRC is not described in legislation, the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan*, *SPSA Annual Report*, or the SPSA programs and services guide. However, SPSA staff indicated that the PRC is responsible for resource prioritization and deployment and allocation during a response, except as it relates to the Emergency and Community Support (ECS) program.

It is unusual for an emergency management organization to have two central coordinating units. Further, based on the mandate of the PEOC, as outlined in policy, to coordinate provincial response and recovery and assign critical provincial resources, it is unclear how the role of the PEOC and PRC differ or if they are coordinated. This led to both internal and external confusion around the intended role of the PEOC during the response.

Multiple interestholders including SPSA staff, local authorities, external government partners, and GoS ministry representatives reported the PEOC was not functioning as a fully operational provincial coordination centre. While it produced daily situation reports, they observed that little to no operational tasking was directed to, or through, the PEOC. Information flow into the PEOC was also described as inconsistent, creating gaps in planning and situational awareness. For example, operations teams reportedly did not submit required reporting, such as 411s, which further constrained the PEOC's ability to maintain an accurate operational picture. GoS staff from other ministries were seconded to the PEOC during the response but did not receive training nor did they have prior ICS training.

SPSA staff also identified communication challenges. Some described the PEOC often lacked access to timely updates from field operations or leadership. These challenges collectively impeded the PEOC's ability to coordinate activities, support decision-making, and provide a unified response framework.

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*"The PEOC was responsible for resource ordering and allocation, which is only the case when it was related to Emergency and Community Support. Operational support and resourcing (supplies for fire response, staffing for incident management team roles from SPSA staff, government employees and contractors, response contractors, aviation, response camp logistics, etc.) are all managed through individual management teams with support from regional duty desks and the Provincial Response Centre."*

*– SPSA staff*

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According to SPSA staff, operational decisions often bypassed ICS structures, leaving many unsure who was directing key elements of the response. Command structures were not consistently followed, and decisions did not reliably move through the intended ICS hierarchy. Staff observed that some political officials and senior SPSA officials made decisions without fully understanding holistic operational implications. SPSA staff reported uncertainty about whose directives to follow and how decisions were being made, which reduced confidence in the coherence of the incident command system.

SPSA staff also echoed concerns about shifting reporting lines that complicated liaising, tasking, and span of control, with some noting that although a command-and-control model existed, it was not executed, and the PEOC was not staffed as it was in prior high-impact seasons. Uneven ICS integration led to inconsistent tasking and therefore unclear accountabilities. In one community, the municipal fire service established its own incident command post and pressed for a local fire break after initial provincial refusals, indicating decisions moved outside the intended chain of command. This type of request and situational awareness would be helpful for a PEOC to track,

and to disseminate this information to other units operating in the area to support a unified response.

In practice, resource requests often moved through personal contacts rather than formal PEOC channels. External partners reported relying on direct messaging to provincial leads because official systems were perceived as too slow, unclear, or ineffective. Meanwhile, local authorities and industry reported having equipment and personnel available but receiving no requests despite having provided information to SPSA prior to the wildfire season.

SPSA staff feedback noted the escalation of issues directly to senior SPSA leaders or even to Ministers to reassign aircraft maintenance crews when formal pathways were unclear. Select interestholders resorted to texting the local Fire Chief to obtain support and sourcing transportation and accommodations themselves when expected provincial supports did not materialize. Limited PEOC coordination reduced visibility into what resources were requested, deployed, or still needed, undermining confidence that resource decisions were made consistently rather than through ad hoc personal channels.

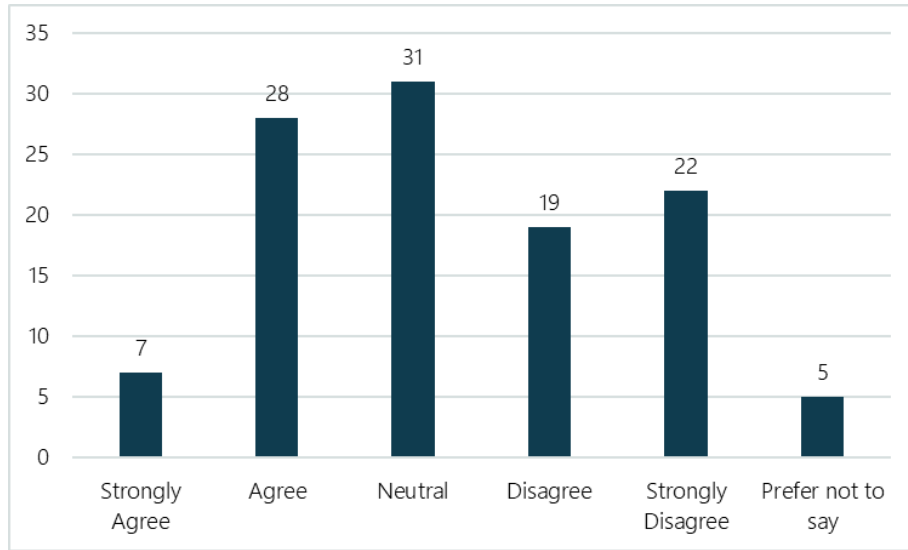
When the PEOC was deescalated to a Level 5 on June 30, it was treated as though it was deactivated and staff were told to resume their normal roles. The deescalation of the PEOC, further disrupted provincial coordination, making it harder to anticipate evacuee needs, align requests, and keep host communities informed. Provincial partners reported limited operational communication, shifting priorities, and unclear timelines for incoming resources. Perceived fairness of resource deployment and credibility of leadership were affected where communication appeared fragmented or reactive.

## Personal and Professional Relationships Drove Wildfire and Emergency Response Operations

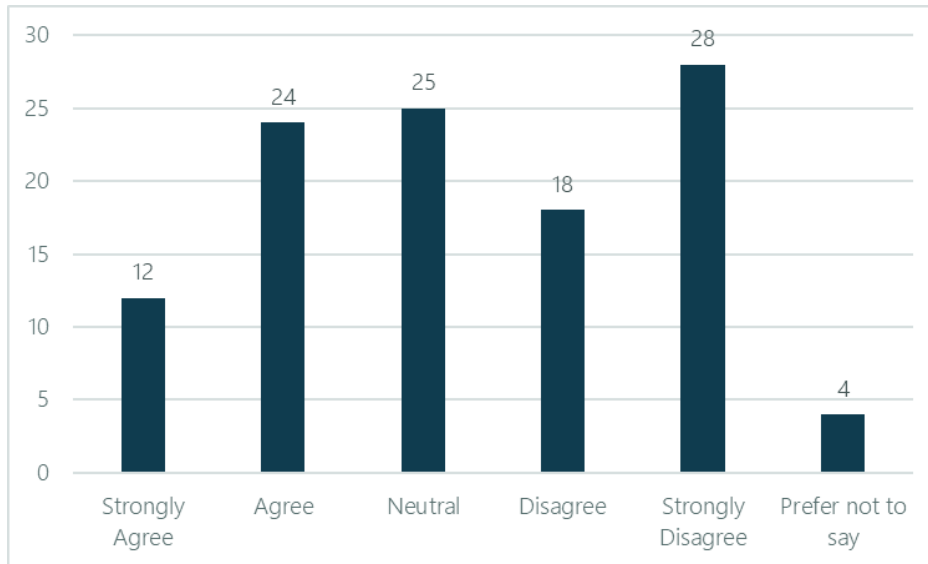
Decision-making during the 2025 Wildfire Season was not coordinated through the PEOC in alignment with the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan* (PEMP) or “PEOC Activation Policy and Procedures,” but was frequently shaped by ad hoc relationships and informal communication. The internal staff survey indicated that 64% (n=72) of respondents were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that the SPSA’s command structure was followed (Figure 8). Additionally, 64% (n=71) of respondents also indicated that they were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that the command structure was effective (Figure 9).

SPSA staff noted that personal and professional connections often outweighed formal plans, with some also noting senior leaders relied on prior relationships and informal briefings, with limited clarity on PEOC direction or awareness of its activities during critical periods. SPSA staff described personality-driven coordination and disconnects between headquarters and field teams, with some regions defaulting to local, informal ties to address issues in real time. SPSA staff assumed the PEMP was not followed because the PEOC was not fully activated, leaving coordination functions underutilized, and information gaps filled informally. As a result, decisions about priorities, tactics, and timing became less transparent, harder to track, and less predictable for those outside key informal networks.

**Figure 8: SPSA Staff Survey: The command structure in SPSA was followed as outlined in policies and procedures (n=112)**



**Figure 9: SPSA Staff Survey: The command structure in SPSA was effective (n=111)**



The lack of a clearly exercised central coordinating role led to uneven communication and resource deployment across communities and incidents. Internal and external interestholders reported inconsistent information flow, noting that communication from the SPSA was incomplete, frequently changing, and difficult to rely on when assessing fire status, evacuations, and resources.

## SPSA's Response was Wildfire-Oriented, Not Emergency Management Led

As previously noted, the SPSA has a mandate related to provincial emergency management response, wildfire response, and emergency dispatch. During the 2025 Wildfire Season, evidence from documents and feedback from both internal and external interestholders indicate that response efforts were driven by fire-suppression priorities rather than a holistic emergency-management approach. SPSA staff reported that wildfire operations acted as the primary decision-makers even when decisions required cross-agency coordination and leadership.

### Knowledge Spotlight: From Fire to Community Impact—Why Emergency Management Matters

Emergency management and wildfire priorities are commonly accepted to be complimentary frameworks with different scopes and focus. Most practitioners frame wildfire priorities as specifically concerned with a fire's behaviour, and how to prevent and suppress the fire, whereas emergency management focuses on the impacts to society and how to address those (e.g., through alerting, financial support, etc.). A coordinated wildfire and emergency response can support a:

- Strengthened Multi-Hazard Readiness and Provincial Coordination
- Enhanced Community Evacuation Preparedness and Support Systems
- Clearly Defined Roles, Established Authorities, and Trained Emergency-Management Capacity
- Integrated and Predictable Multi-Agency Decision-Making Processes
- Strengthened Partnerships and Inclusive Provincial Coordination

Together, these benefits highlight the importance of clear alignment between wildfire and emergency management mandates, as a lack of shared understanding can limit the effectiveness of coordinated planning, decision-making, and response efforts.

Municipal leaders provided their perception that provincial support diminished once the fires approached, leaving communities to manage and sustain structural and wildland firefighters, and support evacuees without the SPSA's presence. Staff at the SPSA reported that decisions flowed almost entirely through wildfire command structures, with little connection to consequence-management systems, and that the PEOC intended to coordinate non-wildfire impacts, remained largely inactive during peak evacuations.

Emergency management principles, consequence management, ICS integration, all-hazards planning existed on paper but were not consistently applied. Interestholders noted the absence of regular multi-agency coordination calls, forcing agencies to rely on informal relationships for

situational awareness. Internal and external interestholders described they were not clear if the PEOC was activated during the 2025 Wildfire Season, leaving emergency management coordination responsibilities unfilled during high-risk periods. GoS ministries and partners reported that unclear SPSA structures and escalation pathways limited alignment with wildfire operations, reinforcing the absence of a holistic approach.

Interestholders reported difficulty obtaining accurate information due to limited inclusion in daily or regular briefings. Partners across communities, governments, Indigenous organizations, CSOs, and volunteer groups shared concerns about SPSA's role as a coordinating body. They highlighted challenges related to communication pathways, consistency of direction and follow-up, the level of support available for managing evacuees, and the extent of engagement with Indigenous governments. Additionally, interestholders shared that there were unused volunteer resources, while CSOs indicated that they had unclear contacts and inconsistent messaging. Participants and respondents perceived those siloed practices within SPSA limited cross-agency collaboration, a perception reinforced by MNP's observations. Strengthening inter-agency integration represents an opportunity to enhance non-wildfire partners' ability to support communities and to reinforce confidence in SPSA's coordination role.

## Senior Officials were Uncertain Regarding their Roles

Several interestholders noted that SPSA leadership repeatedly demonstrated uncertainty about their mandated responsibilities, highlighting systemic gaps in the provincial emergency framework throughout the 2025 Wildfire Season. Foundational questions such as authority for evacuation orders and the Province's role during community evacuations were inconsistently understood across local authorities and the SPSA.

Municipal administrators reported unclear expectations from the Province, while the SPSA's staff reported varying levels of awareness of their own mandates. This ambiguity extended to field-level SPSA staff, where ESOs appeared to interpret responsibilities differently, resulting in conflicting guidance to municipalities, inconsistent roadblock enforcement, and mixed evacuation messaging. Communities experienced confusion about response authority, reduced confidence in provincial decision-making, and delays in implementing protective measures during fast moving fire conditions.

Misunderstandings about decision-making authority within the provincial structure led to delays, conflicting directives, and improvised leadership arrangements. SPSA staff further described the limitations and confusion around the role of the PEOC, which forced operational leads to run nightly meetings independently. The lack of a clear command structure led to duplicated or improvised policy decisions, and in some cases left essential tasks, such as media coordination or resource prioritization, without an accountable lead. Municipal leaders reported stalled evacuations, unclear incident command and radio channels, and late or unavailable information. These information delays hindered local responders and contributed to inconsistent situational awareness across the SPSA, as SPSA staff made decisions without a shared operational picture.

Persistent communication gaps between office-based leadership and field teams further constrained the response. SPSA staff reported limited feedback and support from the

communications branch, and unclear or incomplete responses from the PEOC when support was requested. Although the SPSA has indicated that staff are trained on escalation policies and that during an incident, issues would be escalated through dispatch as per internal policy, interestholders reported there were inconsistent channels for escalating information.

Some municipal leaders reported days without SPSA representation, late Incident Action Plans (IAP), and unbriefed out-of-province liaisons. Municipal interestholders and field based SPSA staff indicated that external partners often provided more reliable updates than the SPSA's own communication processes, leaving SPSA responders without timely information on fire behaviour, resource availability, or strategic direction. These gaps reduced system-wide situational awareness, slowed decision-making, and reduced trust in the SPSA's leadership.

SPSA and external interestholders described several incidents that demonstrated senior SPSA staff making operational decisions without understanding or conforming to ICS processes or field realities, creating safety and effectiveness risks. Two communities described examples where decision-making moved outside of the ICS structure to SPSA Senior Leadership,<sup>30</sup> where the SPSA dismissed requests for protective actions just hours before evacuation. In another incident, SPSA staff reported resource requests approved in IAPs that were delayed for weeks. In some instances, SPSA staff requests and proposals would be denied, only to be expeditiously approved later where the request/proposal may not be as effective or no longer safe to deploy as the situation has changed.

Additionally, interestholder feedback and document reviews indicate that IAPs were not consistently followed, updated, or communicated during the 2025 Wildfire Season, limiting their effectiveness as a coordination tool. Staff reported that IAPs were frequently overridden by SPSA Senior Leadership outside of the ICS structure without clear documentation or explanation, leaving operational teams to work from outdated or incomplete information. This created uncertainty about priorities and resource allocation during rapidly evolving conditions.

## **There was Confusion about Responsibility for Managing Wildfire and Evacuations**

Saskatchewan's emergency management framework establishes that local authorities are responsible for managing emergencies in their jurisdictions. However, municipalities may request support from the province. Where a provincial state of emergency is declared, as occurred on May 29, 2025, the province may assume control of the emergency response, including evacuation activities.

Based on engagement with SPSA staff and municipalities, interestholders were not always clear about who held incident management responsibility or how roles and responsibilities were defined following the declaration of a provincial state of emergency. Communities reported that the SPSA's communication during critical wildfire stages was inconsistent, fragmented, and at times absent, creating uncertainty about evolving conditions and required actions. In several municipalities, local

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<sup>30</sup> Note, SPSA Senior Leadership refers to the Vice President and/or the President

responders said they did not know who was in command of the incident, received no operational briefings, and lacked basic situational updates, including cases where crews were unaware of the Incident Command (IC).

The absence of a standardized process for real-time updates, distribution, and review meant that situational awareness often varied across divisions and partner agencies. Air operations, land crews, external partners, and community responders did not receive consistent or timely updates to guide tactical decisions. Without reliable IAPs, documentation practices, alignment across units was fragmented, and opportunities for coordinated, data-driven decision-making were reduced.

SPSA staff raised similar concerns, noting that director-level resource and tactics meetings began too late in the season, communications support did not arrive when required, and questions about how external information officers should report into the SPSA went unanswered. External partners characterized the SPSA's communication as defensive and unclear, complicating coordination and reducing confidence in planning. SPSA staff also reported not learning about evacuations until they occurred and relying on personal contacts for updates, a role which a defined and functional PEOC should be able to support. As a result, partners and residents operated with partial information, undermining preparedness, disrupting municipal coordination, and reducing confidence in the SPSA's communication channels during fast-moving events.

External partners also reported relying on rumours when they could not obtain accurate details about resource commitments or whether help had been declined, issues clearer information flow could have mitigated. External interestholders described that their understanding of SPSA's fire response strategy is to "let it burn." This reflects a lack of nuance in how the strategy is understood and presents an opportunity for the SPSA to communicate to interestholders such as the forestry industry, how their response strategy is structured and applied in practice. For major fires during the 2025 Wildfire Season, SPSA adopted a "values protection" focus due to the volume of concurrent wildfires it was actively managing; though, it is unclear how SPSA determines which values are prioritized for protection and whether this determination framework was communicated to affected communities and the broader public.

Across response groups, interestholders questioned the rationale underlying SPSA's operational strategies and resource allocation, citing unclear communication and inconsistent decision-making pathways. SPSA staff reported an absence of visible provincial-level prioritization of fires and experienced multi-day delays in responses to resource requests, even as communities faced active threats. This was reflected in the WOLF Fire, (see page 19), where some requests for personnel and equipment were not fulfilled due to resources being committed in other regions. Forestry industry representatives also noted this in the context of limited integrated planning that could more fully leveraged local operators and available data. They described rigid procurement processes and limited collaboration as constraints on effective resource utilization, which further strained operational partnerships and confidence in SPSA's strategic decision-making.

Many communities expected greater leadership visibility and more transparent engagement from SPSA. However, they reported limited presence and unclear authority structures. SPSA staff described extended periods without contact from SPSA Senior Leadership, even while managing active threats with constrained resources. SPSA staff also identified challenges, including the

absence of a well-functioning PEOC, which left local officials uncertain about appropriate points of contact for direction and decision-making. Communities further noted infrequent briefings, evolving delegation of authority, and turnover in leadership positions, which at times reduced clarity in roles and decision-making typically expected from a provincial coordinating agency. Interestholders described receiving limited information from SPSA leadership, being directed to public hotlines for updates, and independently mobilizing social supports without provincial coordination. As a result, some communities perceived SPSA as insufficiently present and responsive during the response.

## There was room to Improve a Coordinated Emergency Response

### Activation and Management of Surge Staffing

SPSA interestholders described persistent staffing strain across functions, including logistics, procurement, provincial duty desk, air operations, maintenance, Emergency and Community Support (ECS), and the PEOC. Roles in these areas were stretched, and interestholders described regularly operating with fewer personnel led activations, as staff were reassigned from their core duties without backfill plans. In interviews, SPSA staff from fire bases shared that they feel they often operate with too few people, and seasonal layoffs disrupt continuity.

#### Surge Spotlight: Scaling Up—External Support in Action

The contracting of external supports is a common practice and is used by many jurisdictions. The SPSA did not have a formal surge program in place, but sought external support, which proved beneficial, as several interestholders described external personnel as providing strong operational clarity, consistent communication, and situational awareness. SPSA staff noted that working with external teams was an incredible experience, emphasizing that these teams maintained reliable information flow and predictable coordination practices. External partners also reported that external Incident Management Team members proactively shared forward-looking projections, which improved pre-planning and resource readiness. Once roles were aligned, external partners worked seamlessly with the SPSA, resulting in more effective operational collaboration than what typically occurs. Given the SPSA's limited internal surge capacity, widespread staffing shortages, and reports of personnel managing multiple roles, the presence of external responders helped stabilize field operations during periods of heightened demand. As a result, external teams served as a critical supplement to internal resources by providing experienced capacity, structured coordination, and operational consistency at a time when internal systems were strained.

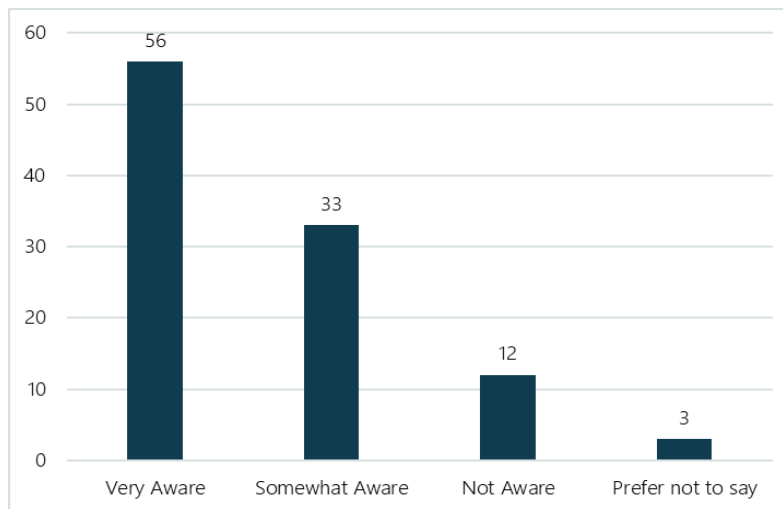
Leading practice with other provincial emergency management agencies and amongst emergency management teams in partner agencies (e.g., SaskPower and the SHA) is to have a surge capacity

plan during long events, highlighting the need for predictable surge pathways, proactive training and pre-approved protocols. During the 2025 Wildfire Response, SPSA’s surge staffing appeared reactive. While some tools were in place to support surge resourcing, there is an opportunity to strengthen program continuity planning through a more formal framework for activating, training, and supporting surge staff onboarding.

### Role Clarity, Accountability, and Decision-making Structures

The responses to the internal SPSA staff survey indicated that 53% (n=56) were “Very Aware” of SPSA’s internal Incident Command structure (Figure 10). However, during engagement, SPSA staff reported that roles and responsibilities are often unclear, especially during active incidents.

**Figure 10: SPSA Staff Survey: Awareness of SPSA’s Internal Incident Command Structure before the 2025 Wildfire Season (n=104)**



SPSA reports that 67.9% of job descriptions have been reviewed since 2020. However, this Review found that job descriptions were not consistently aligned with the work required during wildfire and emergency response, limiting role clarity and readiness and indicating gaps in functional preparedness.

SPSA staff reported that job descriptions do not always clearly reflect the actual duties of each role. Additionally, job descriptions are inconsistent in format, and in some cases, document titles do not reflect the job title recorded in the job description. SPSA staff report they often take on varied duties with little documentation or guidance. Roles are sometimes improvised due to missing SOPs or job descriptions, and there is no formal process for coordinating information or calls during wildfire response.

## Monitoring and Addressing Staff Wellbeing

During the active wildfire season, SPSA staff described experiencing high levels of stress that accumulated over time. Results from the SPSA staff survey indicated that 91 per cent of respondents were aware of team members who experienced mental health impacts because of the wildfire event.

Staff interviews further indicated that, while supports such as the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), Public Safety Professional Network (PSPNET), Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), and access to contracted clinicians were available during the response, their accessibility and availability did not consistently meet staff expectations.

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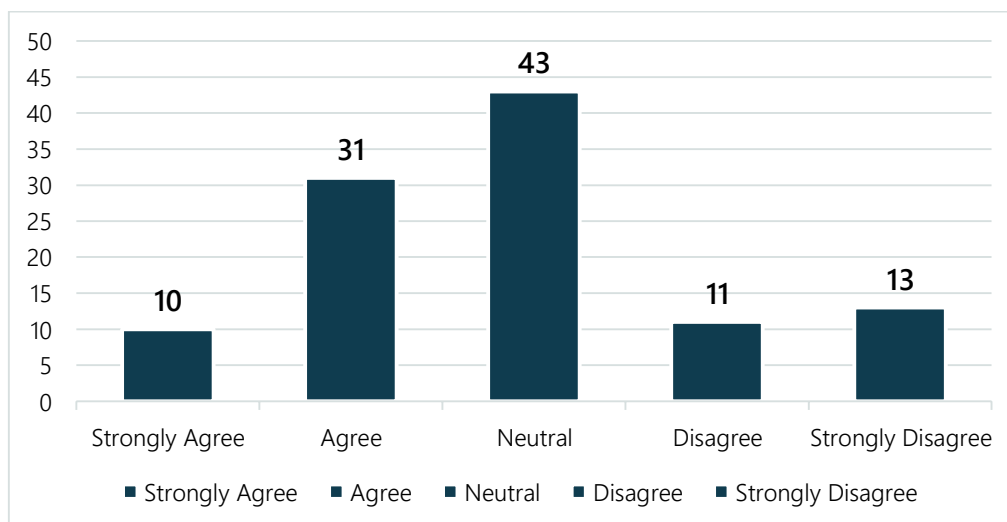
*"People had to find their own support... I became the psychological support... we have EFAP, but people didn't know how to access it."*

*-SPSA staff*

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In-person support was absent and missed by those responding to the wildfires. SPSA staff also reported a perception that access to mental health resources was not consistently normalized or actively supported within the organization. While 37% (n=41) of internal SPSA survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the mental health supports provided met their needs, a significant number 39% (n=43) responded neutrally and 22% (n=24) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting mixed experiences and uneven confidence in the adequacy of available supports (Figure 11).

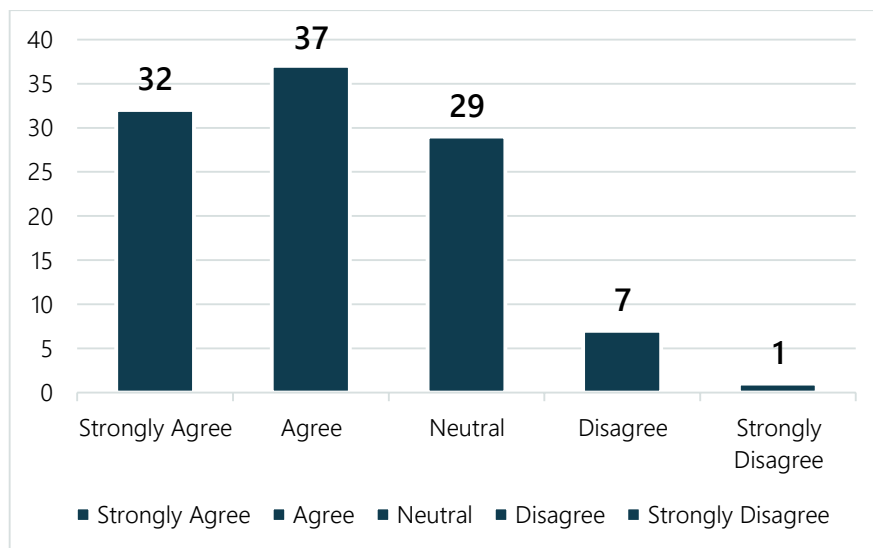
**Figure 11: SPSA staff survey: SPSA staff perception that Agency provided mental health supports met staff's needs (n=108)**



SPSA staff indicated that psychological well-being is not formally monitored during active response periods and that staff often rely on informal coping strategies, such as managing stress independently or seeking peer support, as structured debriefs following high stress events are

infrequent. While monthly manager memos highlighted available mental health programs and support services, and information was accessible through the SPSA SharePoint site, these measures did not fully meet staff needs or expectations. Results from the SPSA staff survey further indicated that 52% (n=62) of respondents provided informal peer support to colleagues during the wildfire season (Figure 12)

**Figure 12: SPSA staff Survey: SPSA staff who provided informal peer support to colleagues (n=106)**



Compounding these challenges, SPSA staff reported that contracted clinician capacity was insufficient, with staff frequently unable to access counselling services due to busy phone lines or fully booked appointments.

Through engagement activities conducted during this Review, the prevailing workplace culture was described as negative, siloed, and hierarchical, with perceptions of favouritism and a lack of trust. SPSA staff expressed uncertainty regarding reporting pathways, particularly during surge deployments when they were assigned to unfamiliar teams. These conditions contributed to increased stress, delayed decision-making, and operational friction.

The findings further reinforce this assessment, with staff citing ongoing stigma related to mental health, particularly among more experienced SPSA staff, as well as operational barriers, including extended shifts, remote work conditions, and competing priorities, which limited their ability to access supports during critical periods.

Operational fatigue risks were also evident during the 2025 Wildfire Season. Extended working hours for “boots-on-the-ground” personnel, combined with the absence of formal rotation plans, increased burnout and safety concerns. Staff reported that fatigue became pervasive by the latter part of the 2025 Wildfire Season.

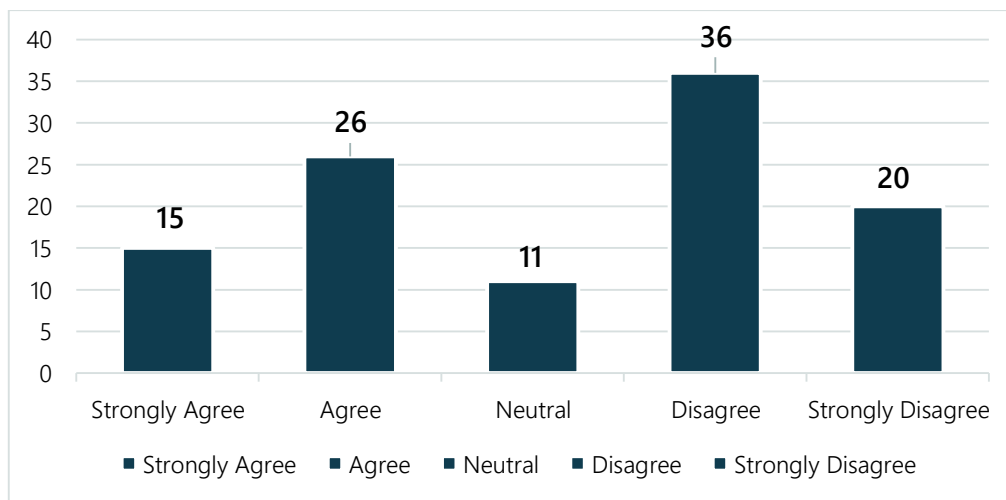
## Leadership Competencies and Trauma-Informed Practices

The SPSA provided the summary results of an internal employee culture survey that was conducted from April 30-May 30, 2025, in the middle of the wildfire season. The results are based on a sample of 306 surveys and indicate generally positive team and supervisory support. However, during the engagement period for this Review between October 2025 - March 2026, SPSA staff expressed concerns regarding SPSA’s organizational leadership, describing it as disconnected from day-to-day operations and slow to respond to emerging issues.

This perceived lack of leadership engagement contributed to staff feeling that their perspectives were not being heard within the organization. SPSA staff further indicated that their expertise was undervalued, noting that decisions affecting their work were often made without their input or involvement. As a result, staff reported frustration, believing that their experience and insights could more meaningfully inform organizational outcomes.

Some SPSA staff also reported negative workplace dynamics within certain teams, particularly in areas where leadership was perceived as disengaged and conflicts remained unresolved. Results from the internal survey indicated that 38% (n=41) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had witnessed bullying or harassment directed toward others (Figure 13). Staff described this environment as contributing to increased resignations following the wildfire season and negatively affecting overall morale. Additional feedback indicated that leaders did not consistently check in with staff during or after significant incidents, which left staff feeling unsupported during challenging periods.

**Figure 13: SPSA staff Survey: SPSA staff who witnessed bullying or harassment towards others (n=108)**



When considered collectively, these accounts of workplace experiences, including factors affecting well-being and trust, instances of unresolved conflict, and limited support following critical incidents, suggest opportunities to strengthen leadership capacity. Specifically, they point to areas where competencies such as conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and effective communication could be further developed to support teams and the organization as a whole.

## There were Challenges with Public Communication and Information Sharing

SPSA communications staff worked to share information to the public in a rapidly changing situation. The Communications team used available resources to increase their support to meet the operational and public need for communication. The team worked with the Operations Team and SPSA leaders daily to discuss the information that would be disseminated to the public on multiple channels such as the SPSA website, Facebook, public request, and press releases. Between May and August 2025, SPSA received over 280 media requests. Staff indicated that consistent key messaging was developed and reiterated; however, it was not always reflected in public understanding or reception.

Interestholders described irregular early-season briefings, unclear reporting lines during major incidents, confusion in evacuation support, and defensive external messaging that intensified concerns as the season progressed. SPSA staff reported inconsistent command practices across regions, reflecting a lack of standardized communication protocols. Interestholders consistently sought updates and clarity on responsibilities, straining their own operations and reinforcing the perception that provincial messaging was unreliable. The SPSA's staff noted that media releases lacked necessary detail and teams were deployed without adequate briefings. These gaps contributed to views that the SPSA was reactive rather than strategic, weakening confidence in the Agency's ability to provide timely, accurate, and coordinated information.

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*The SPSA Public Survey found 48% of respondents suggested a need for clearer, more proactive, more transparency communication from the SPSA before and during emergencies.*

*-SPSA Public Survey*

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Additionally, SPSA staff reported they relied heavily on informal networks as formal channels were slow or incomplete. Reportedly the SPSA Duty Desk became a bottleneck for resource requests, with some delays lasting up to a week. SPSA staff described limited access to current fire maps, weather forecasts, and operational intelligence.

Communication with external partners was similarly inconsistent. Municipalities, ministries, and other agencies reported receiving evacuation notices and deployment updates that were delayed or changed without clear explanation. The absence of a standardized onboarding process for external personnel further complicated coordination.

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*The SPSA Public Survey found 42% of respondents frequently turned to social media platforms (especially Facebook community pages) for timely updates and situational awareness.*

*-SPSA Public Survey*

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Public communication faced additional challenges. Media releases and public alerts were occasionally delayed or unclear. For example, at least one SaskAlert notification contained inaccurate information, prompting a public correction, identified through the document review. Additionally, social media misinformation circulated rapidly, requiring staff to spend time addressing false narratives. Public interestholder

feedback included descriptions that these information inconsistencies and misinformation were also spread through the phone system, where callers were provided incorrect information. While error and mistakes are expected as part of an ongoing, lengthy, high-pressure emergency event, it is important to ensure there are appropriate procedures to quickly correct errors made. Technology limitations worsened these challenges. Fire bases had limited connectivity, particularly early in the season. Starlink units, introduced mid-season, enhanced communication capacity, though not all connectivity gaps were fully addressed.

## The Forestry Industry and External Partners are Willing to Support Wildfire Response Efforts

Saskatchewan's forestry industry has been actively involved in the development of the SPSA's *SK Forest Industry Wildfire Prevention and Preparedness Standard*. The standard is intended to reduce the risk of human-caused wildfires and improve preparedness and response capacity within the Saskatchewan forest industry. It provides a standardized framework that forest licensees, employees, and contractors must follow to meet their obligations under *The Wildfire Act* and to demonstrate due diligence in wildfire prevention and management

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*"We are going to be the best ally in your fight against the fire. We need to find alignment."*

*-Forestry Industry Representative*

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Industry interestholders shared during interviews they have worked in good faith to implement and follow its requirements, including operational restrictions, equipment readiness, and precautionary measures during high-risk periods. They maintained they provided the required information, plans, and data to support wildfire management and have demonstrated compliance with established expectations, reflecting a commitment to minimizing wildfire risk and supporting public safety outcomes.

The forestry industry and other external partners, such as outfitters and related organizations, expressed a strong willingness to work collaboratively with the SPSA. Industry interestholders emphasized that they see themselves as a critical ally during wildfire events, bringing local knowledge, specialized equipment, and experienced personnel that can meaningfully strengthen suppression, mitigation, and recovery activities. There is a shared understanding across the sector that effective wildfire response depends on early action, coordination, and trusted relationships, and industry remains ready to play a constructive role when engaged.

Industry interestholders and First Nation communities indicated that they felt underutilized during the 2025 Wildfire Season, noting that resources, personnel, and equipment were available, at times staged and ready, but not being formally requested or engaged by the SPSA. Forestry industry interestholders indicated that they are prepared to act as a supplementary resource within the broader response framework. With clearer triggers, communication pathways, and integration into response planning, the forestry industry and external partners expressed that they stand ready to be mobilized quickly and effectively in support of wildfire response efforts.



## 5.0 Key Findings: Evacuation Assessment

Evacuation in emergency management response is the organized and systematic movement of people away from areas threatened by hazards. It should involve decision-making by authorities, clear communication with the public, and coordination of transportation, shelters, and support services. Effective evacuation planning prioritizes vulnerable populations and ensures routes and resources are in place before conditions become life-threatening.

The guiding review question for this area was: ***How well were evacuation activities aligned with established roles and responsibilities for the SPSA and partners, and to what extent were ECS supports effectively delivered to those in need?***

### Review Finding Summary:



#### Limited Evidence

There is limited evidence that evacuation activities during the 2025 Wildfire Season were aligned with the established roles and responsibilities of the SPSA and its partners. As outlined in legislation, a local authority is responsible for emergency response activities, including evacuation, unless the Minister assumes direction and control. In this case, the Minister assumed control on May 29, 2025, when the provincial emergency was declared. This resulted in confusion among SPSA and local authorities regarding who was responsible for evacuation activities.

Processes for issuing alerts and evacuation orders were inconsistent, often delayed, and lacked the standardized triggers or communication pathways that communities expected. As a result, host communities frequently received little notice of incoming evacuees, leaving these communities underprepared and forced into reactive decision-making. These breakdowns in coordination, combined with unclear roles between the SPSA and partner agencies, created uncertainty, strained local capacity, and weakened confidence in the SPSA's ability to provide timely, consistent evacuation leadership.

Similarly, ECS supports were not effectively delivered to evacuees due to structural and operational limitations within the program. The ECS system relied on outdated, paper-based registration processes that quickly collapsed under the high volumes of evacuees, leading to backlogs, duplicate files, and data accuracy issues. The absence of clear SOPs and the blurring of responsibilities between ECS and the PEOC further contributed to inefficiencies and confusion. SPSA staff were often tasked with responsibilities beyond the program's scope, such as administering emergency financial payments, reducing capacity for core supports and slowing service delivery. Collectively, these gaps led to inconsistent, delayed, and fragmented supports for evacuees during a period of heightened vulnerability.

## ECS Program Supports Require Greater Clarity and Consistency

The Emergency and Community Support program (also referred to as Emergency Crisis Support) (ECS)<sup>31</sup> helps communities support residents during emergencies that require evacuations, such as wildfires. The program provides coordination, tools, and resources to ensure evacuees are safely accounted for and connected to essential services.

Through the ECS, communities can register evacuees, track their needs, and share information with response teams. This allows local leaders and emergency officials to better allocate supports like lodging, food, and other services, ensuring people receive timely assistance while improving overall emergency response and recovery efforts

The ECS program falls under the Logistics and Support Services branch. According to the October 2025 organizational chart, the team includes three individuals including:

- 1 Director
- 2 Support Coordinators

Interstholders noted that while the SPSA does provide several resources to support communities in preparing for emergencies, additional efforts could strengthen overall preparedness. SPSA makes available online resources that include guidance on requesting provincial assistance, training for community emergency planning committees, and leading practices related to wildfire preparedness. However, both internal and external interstholders acknowledged that access to templates or basic guidance does not equate to comprehensive preparedness, and that communities require more hands-on support from the SPSA to effectively develop and implement emergency plans.

Although interstholders referenced ECS governance, an ECS governance framework was not provided for review, and it does not appear that the province had an established ECS framework or plan in place during the wildfire season. An *ECS Operational Guide* released in August 2025 outlines roles and responsibilities, ECS operations, and required documents and systems. It is unclear whether an earlier version of this guide existed or was available during the 2025 wildfire response.

The registration program operated using paper-based registration systems that had not been updated since 2015, and these systems collapsed under the weight of unprecedented evacuation volumes of the past summer's fire season. Without digitized processes or scalable tools, ECS teams encountered severe backlogs, duplicate records, and data accuracy issues that slowed intake and service delivery. These structural limitations were compounded by the absence of clear, consistently applied SOPs, leaving staff without guidance on core functions such as surge staffing, verification protocols, and multi-community intake coordination. Even when materials were developed, for example, public-facing ECS brochures, they were not distributed, highlighting system-wide issues in procedural follow-through and implementation discipline. Collectively, these reflect a

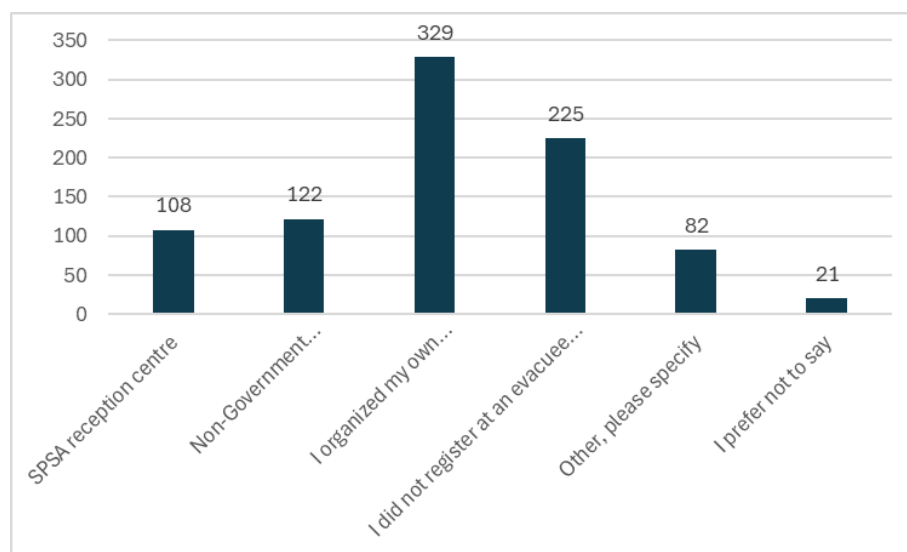
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<sup>31</sup> The SPSA website refers to the program as "Emergency and Community Support" although internal policies and procedures manuals refer to the program as "Emergency Crisis Support."

governance model that had not kept pace with the complexity and scale of modern emergency management.

The SPSA Public Survey found that 26% (n=108) of respondents that identified as evacuees registered at an SPSA reception centre or at a non-governmental organization’s reception centre, while 64% (n=554) of respondents that identified as an evacuee organizing their own accommodation or not registering at an evacuee reception centre (Figure 14). While MNP could not corroborate this statistic based on the available data, with other reports or data points provided by SPSA as representative of a broader trend, this statistic may be worth investigating further as this type of evacuation accommodation preference may be worth the SPSA incorporating into future evacuation programming considerations.

**Figure 14: Public Survey: Type of evacuee reception center evacuees registered with (n=887)**



## There Was a Lack of Responsibility Clarity Between the ECS Program and PEOC

As described in Section 1.0, there was confusion as to what the role of the PEOC was during the response, including the evacuation. Interestholders described further confusion related to the evacuation response, between the responsibilities of the SPSA ECS program and those of the PEOC. Both internal teams and external partners noted that program mandates were blurred, leading to confusion about who was responsible for coordination, communication, and operational decisions during evacuations. Several host communities reported learning of incoming evacuees only after buses arrived, describing a breakdown in communication that forced them into reactive mode. This lack of forewarning had practical consequences, including insufficient staffing, unprepared reception centres, and strained relationships with the SPSA. The misalignment between ECS and PEOC roles also contributed to inconsistent messaging, fragmented situational awareness, and operational inefficiencies at a time when cohesion was critical.

It is important to note the ECS team demonstrated a strong willingness to adapt and pivot in response to emerging needs, and staff were routinely tasked with responsibilities outside the program's original mandate. While this flexibility supported evolving operational demands, it also stretched capacity and introduced avoidable risks. A notable example was the assignment of the Government's \$500 emergency payment program to SPSA's Finance and ECS teams. This initiative was launched mid-way through the 2025 Wildfire Season. The program was announced without advance notice, limiting SPSA's ability to prepare staff or systems before requests were received. This responsibility required manual processing and eligibility checks during an already high-pressure operational period. Staff reported that adding large-scale financial administration to their existing workloads reduced their ability to focus on core crisis-support functions and contributed to slower processing times, errors, and public frustration. This scope creep exacerbated staffing pressures, increased burnout risk, and highlighted the need for clearer provincial-level planning for emergency financial support mechanisms.

ECS also faced challenges in administering emergency financial supports. While well intentioned, evacuees reported encountering administrative burdens, unclear eligibility rules, and repeated requests for the same information across multiple touchpoints. Payments that were intended to provide immediate stabilization instead often added stress due to long wait times, unclear processes, and inconsistent application of verification steps. Internal teams noted a lack of cross-ministry coordination and limited advance planning for how emergency payments would integrate with registration, intake, and case management activities. These weaknesses reduced the reliability of financial support mechanisms and compromised the overall evacuee experience during a period of high vulnerability.

## Inconsistent Evacuation Notifications Created Uncertainties

SaskAlert<sup>32</sup> is the GoS' emergency public alerting program, administered by SPSA and governed by the *Emergency Planning Act*, subsection 13 (f). It sends alerts about emergencies in real-time so people can keep themselves, their families, and their property safe. These alerts should provide information on what the emergency is, the location, and instructions to stay safe.

Communities can opt-in to participate in public alerting either individually, or if they wish to cover a larger geographical area, work together with neighbouring communities. The SPSA has the authority to designate alerting responsibilities to communities and is responsible for ensuring the proper training is administered.

SaskAlert SOPs<sup>33</sup> are available and contain the options for participation in SaskAlert and the training requirements, as well as a policy that can help guide both the SPSA and any authorized jurisdictions use the system.

Municipal interestholders and feedback from the public survey described widespread inconsistencies in the issuance of evacuation alerts and orders. As noted, in cases where the municipality is trained in the SaskAlert System, they will issue an alert, otherwise the SPSA can

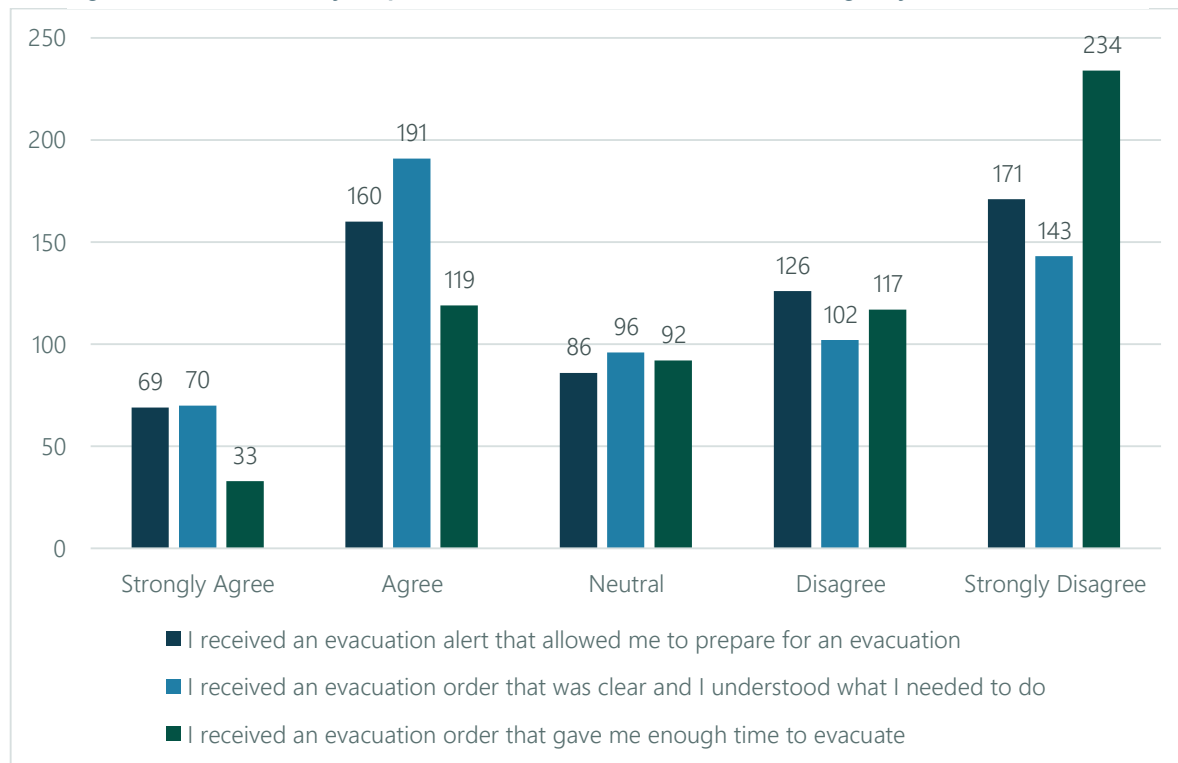
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<sup>32</sup> SPSA. "SaskAlert." <https://www.saskpublicsafety.ca/at-home/saskalert>

<sup>33</sup> SaskAlert Standard Operating Protocols

support this action. Further evidence of this finding is illustrated in (Figure 15), where almost 50% (n=893) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they received an evacuation order that either allowed them to prepare (297), that was clear/allow for clear understanding on what to do (245), or gave enough time to evacuate (351).

**Figure 15: Public Survey: Experiences of Evacuees Related to Emergency Alerts (n=644)**



Four host communities who were engaged for this Review emphasized that they lacked advance communication, resources, and guidance needed to effectively receive evacuees, compounding logistical challenges during peak wildfire events. These delays and inconsistencies lowered trust in the SPSA’s evacuation coordination and weakened the broader emergency response system.

## Evacuee Spotlight: Where You Are Matters—Jurisdiction and Access to Support

The following spotlight is intended to highlight the jurisdictional complexities between an Indigenous community and a local authority regarding financial programs to support an evacuee. While geographical boundaries exist to delineate where one governing body's authority ends and where another's begin, it can be challenging for evacuees to be eligible for differing financial support from their immediate neighbour(s) due to a geographical boundary. Effectively, geographical boundaries delineate different policy frameworks from different levels of government. This complexity can be seen in the La Ronge region, where three adjacent but administratively distinct jurisdictions may result in different eligibilities for support for an evacuee. Specifically, the three communities were:

- a) Town of La Ronge (municipal; provincial jurisdiction)
- b) Village of Air Ronge (municipal; provincial jurisdiction)
- c) Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) (First Nation; federal jurisdiction)

There are several jurisdictional complexities when determining the type of financial support an evacuee is eligible to receive. Eligibilities for support may depend on which community the evacuee resided in during the event, which community the evacuee spent most of their time in, or which nation an evacuee may identify with. Depending on the policy framework, provincial evacuee support programs may offer a specific fixed amount, while federal evacuee support programs may offer a different fixed amount for the exact same emergency event. These jurisdictional complexities should be identified, understood, and communicated in advance of an emergency financial support program, thereby offering clear pathways and expectations for evacuees. Without clarity on eligibilities and pathways, communities must navigate complexities with program development (or program delivery) depending on the demographic of their community.

### LLRIB Member Residing in La Ronge (Off-Reserve)

- Follows municipal/provincial evacuation orders.
- Despite strong cultural and community ties to LLRIB, they must apply through provincial financial assistance programs, as federal First Nations emergency supports do not apply to off-reserve residents.
- Their intake process depends on verification of municipal address and evacuation status.
- Many experience confusion over whether their Nation membership affects eligibility.

Consideration: A high risk of misdirection between the Nation and provincial supports, creating delays and inconsistencies in guidance.

### LLRIB Member Residing in Sucker River Reserve (On-Reserve)

- Evacuation direction and coordination are managed by LLRIB leadership, supported by federal emergency management frameworks.
- Financial supports are accessed through Nation-administered programs, funded through federal mechanisms.
- The Nation maintains local household and residency records, allowing for more streamlined intake.

Consideration: During major evacuation events, Nation administrative capacity may be overwhelmed, leading to processing delays.

### Non-Indigenous Resident Living in La Ronge

- Follows provincial or municipal evacuation orders.
- Navigates a single, consistent assistance pathway under provincial programs.
- Eligibility is based solely on residence within the evacuation zone.

Consideration: May witness a community member receiving different supports while also living in the La Ronge jurisdiction without knowing whether the community member may be Indigenous or non-Indigenous; this may create perceptions of inequality.

## Adequacy and Accessibility of ECS Program Support

SPSA staff observed that residents and community service providers encountered inconsistent access to ECS resources during wildfire evacuations. Jurisdictional complexities, such as distinctions between on-reserve and off-reserve populations, and ambiguous eligibility criteria contributed to widespread confusion, service delays, and uneven support delivery.

Interstholders identified additional challenges in collaboration between the SPSA and its partners, including First Nations, health authorities, municipal staff, and CSOs such as the Red Cross. Miscommunication and differing interpretations of roles and responsibilities created unnecessary stress for both evacuees and service delivery teams. The evidence underscores the importance of enhanced pre-season planning, shared operating procedures, and stronger communication workflows to improve the consistency and effectiveness of ECS delivery during emergency events. Key HR-related findings indicate that effective evacuation operations rely heavily on clear role assignments and accountability among the SPSA staff. While a broad range of operational and support roles are deployed during wildfire events, inconsistent definitions of responsibilities can lead to confusion and operational delays. Staff are uncertain about their duties, especially when responsibilities shift without transparent communication, which undermines morale and dilutes accountability.

### Assignment and Accountability of Roles

During the 2025 Wildfire Season, SPSA deployed a broad range of operational and support functions to respond to complex and evolving conditions. While this reflected the organization's scale of effort, some interstholders expressed uncertainty regarding which SPSA units were responsible for information dissemination, decision-making, and coordination with external partners during evacuation situations. This uncertainty created challenges in maintaining a seamless flow of information and effective collaboration, both internally and with partner organizations.

A review of internal documentation confirms that, while formal organizational structures are in place, these frameworks were not consistently implemented. The lack of integration between wildfire and emergency management units responsible for evacuation often led to operational ambiguities. Staff reported that duties shifted during events without a transparent rationale, thereby diluting accountability and slowing coordinated response efforts.

Further, interstholders highlighted ongoing uncertainty about escalation processes. Staff expressed concerns about inconsistent communication with leadership and unclear decision-making authority, which contributed to operational delays during evacuation coordination. This ambiguity not only hampered timely responses to emerging gaps but also created confusion between the SPSA units and partner organizations involved in crisis response.

## Mental Health Resources and Psychological Safety Protocols for Evacuation Support Staff

SPSA staff directly involved in evacuations highlight gaps in mental health and psychological safety support. These staff were often the first point of contact for evacuees, fielding urgent, emotional calls from people forced to leave their communities, homes, and familiar surroundings. Staff described the unique pressures of speaking with distressed individuals, managing high volumes of calls, and bearing the emotional weight of repeated, often traumatic, conversations throughout the wildfire season.

Despite the intensity of this work, many SPSA staff reported a lack of formal debriefing sessions, psychological support, or wellness check-ins tailored to their experiences on the front lines of communication. The absence of structured support meant staff frequently returned to their regular duties immediately after deployment, without opportunities to process what they had experienced or decompress from the emotional demands of their roles.

Several SPSA staff members noted that although resources such as the EFAP were available, there is an opportunity for leadership to more consistently reinforce or normalize their use. SPSA staff recounted feelings of isolation and burnout, compounded by a lack of follow-up from supervisors and an organizational culture that discouraged open conversations about mental health. Some expressed concerns about stigma and fears of being perceived as weak if they sought help, particularly when their work involved managing the anxieties and distress of evacuees in real time. This reluctance to access support was further exacerbated by the absence of clinician-guided reintegration processes, after-action reviews, or peer support opportunities specifically designed for those managing evacuation communications.

### Psychosocial Spotlight: Alone at the Hottest Moment

One SPSA staff member described the moment they realized they were “completely alone” during a peak response period. After weeks of extended shifts with no rotation, they felt physical and emotional exhaustion intensifying. Although EFAP existed, the SPSA staff did not trust its confidentiality. The one clinician they tried calling was fully booked. Without leadership check-ins or structured debriefs, they leaned on a colleague who became an informal point of support—someone who admitted they were “not trained for this,” but stepped in because no one else did.

By late season, this SPSA staff member noted that “fatigue was everywhere,” with people snapping at each other and making avoidable mistakes. They described the culture as reactive: “You get support only after you break down.”



## 6.0 Key Findings: Recovery Strategy

The recovery stage in emergency management refers to the planned actions taken after an emergency or disaster to restore communities, services, and infrastructure. An effective recovery strategy coordinates government agencies, non-profits, and community interestholders to support a safe and sustainable return to normalcy.

The guiding review question for this area was: ***To what degree is the SPSA following an established recovery strategy?***

**Review Finding Summary:**



**Limited Evidence**

Saskatchewan demonstrated the ability to mobilize recovery efforts early in the season, including the rapid activation of an SPSA Recovery Task Team. While programs such as the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program provide important support, the absence of a provincial recovery strategy at the outset of the season contributed to ongoing uncertainty regarding roles, priorities, and the overall approach to recovery. In addition, existing program policies have not fully kept pace with the increasing frequency, scale, and complexity of emergency events, which are driving more diverse and prolonged recovery needs.

In the absence of a comprehensive strategy, recovery activities across the province were often implemented on a case-by-case basis, resulting in variability in approach and coordination. Establishing a clear, province-wide recovery framework would strengthen consistency, alignment, and strategic direction in future recovery efforts.

## PDAP Policies Remain Consistent Year-Over-Year

The Saskatchewan Provincial Disaster Assistance Program (PDAP) provides financial support to eligible residents, small businesses, agricultural operations, and communities to recover from natural disasters. It applies to uninsurable losses (losses not covered by private insurance) for property owners, tenants, small businesses, and farmers. It provides funding to clean, repair, and replace essential, uninsurable assets damaged by events like floods or tornadoes, aiming to restore property to its pre-disaster function, rather than replacement value. Although the PDAP program is a recovery tool, it is not a recovery strategy.

Interestholder feedback and a review of documentation indicate that PDAP policies<sup>34</sup> have not evolved in step with SPSA's expanding mandate. Interestholders described the program as relatively static and slow to adapt to changing recovery needs. SPSA staff similarly noted that several long-standing, grandfathered procedures remain in place despite evolving requirements, with some processes characterized as outdated, incomplete, or based on assumptions rather than updated guidance.

While incremental administrative updates have been made to the PDAP program, local authorities reported that the program can be experienced as relatively inflexible, particularly with respect to eligibility criteria, timelines, and administrative requirements. Overall, the evidence suggests that while policy stability supports continuity, limited policy renewal may reduce the program's ability to adapt to evolving and increasingly complex recovery needs.

PDAP's established procedures have provided consistency over time; however, they have not substantively evolved alongside broader system improvements. External interestholder feedback further indicated that some communities lacked formal emergency or recovery plans, and that communication at times was perceived as reactive and unclear, which may have contributed to challenges navigating PDAP's eligibility and administrative requirements. The Recovery Task Team's (RTT) experience points to a misalignment between increasing recovery complexity and existing policy frameworks, suggesting an opportunity for PDAP policies to further adapt to emerging recovery realities.

## The Lack of a Provincial Recovery Strategy Creates Uncertainty for Communities

A provincial recovery strategy typically outlines details related to the coordination and approach to recover from a major event. Depending on the maturity of an organization, a recovery strategy can contemplate many categories of recovery including social, health, economic, environmental, and infrastructure systems. While specific topics within each category can range, having a baseline strategy ensures everyone is aware of the priorities and focus, and can maintain expectations. Provincial recovery efforts are the primary resources for communities to recover, especially for

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<sup>34</sup> SPSA. 2025. "Provincial Disaster Assistance Program." <https://www.saskpublicsafety.ca/communities/provincial-disaster-assistance-program>

communities that are remote, rural, and whom may be lacking capacity. By clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, and policy direction, a well-established recovery strategy can help ease the emotional and financial hardships that tend to accompany recovery after a major event.

For the SPSA, external interestholder feedback highlighted the absence of a clear provincial recovery strategy, resulting in uncertainty once the response phase ends. Roles between the communities, SPSA, and provincial ministries remain inconsistently defined, with participants frequently expressing confusion about authority, coordination expectations, and who leads key aspects of recovery. This ambiguity is reinforced by legislation: while the Saskatchewan's *EPA* and *FSA* outline high-level responsibilities, it provides no detailed recovery governance, sequencing, or inter-agency coordination requirements; similarly, *The (Saskatchewan) Wildfire Act* focuses primarily on response and suppression, offering limited guidance on post-fire recovery or long-term obligations.

Interestholder feedback noted these gaps manifest in practical challenges including inconsistent handoffs, unclear PEOC roles, and uncertainty about which government body is responsible for follow-up tasks such as evacuation support or reimbursement processes. Multiple participants described communities navigating recovery on their own, noting that in the absence of a provincial framework, recovery relies heavily on local initiative and informal relationships rather than coordinated provincial guidance. These experiences emphasize a consistent message from interestholders, responsibilities become increasingly unclear once the response phase ends.

Despite the absence of a formal recovery strategy at the outset of the season, the SPSA demonstrated responsiveness by establishing a dedicated Recovery Task Team (RTT) in early July 2025. This cross-ministry team was mandated to support communities affected by the 2025 Wildfire Season and to advance coordinated, long-term recovery through a "one-window" approach intended to streamline decision-making.

At the time of this Review, it was too early to fully assess the RTT's effectiveness. However, in the absence of an overarching recovery framework, the RTT may face challenges in consistently guiding and sustaining recovery efforts. These may include navigating decisions related to the allocation of financial supports across Government of Saskatchewan programs (including PDAP), considering approaches such as building back better, and balancing equity and consistency in addressing diverse community recovery needs.



## 7.0 Recommendations

Recommendations and associated actionable strategies have been developed to support the findings of this Review. Each recommendation is defined to ensure clarity and connected to various intended outcomes. Recommendations may overlap and apply to multiple review topics. The five review topics are represented by the icons below, which will be highlighted when applicable to the recommendation.

To support clarity and accountability in implementing the recommendations that follow, it is important to note that unless a recommendation explicitly identifies an alternative lead, the SPSA should be assumed to hold primary responsibility for driving the action forward. This approach ensures consistency in ownership, reduces ambiguity during implementation, and reinforces SPSA's central role in coordinating and advancing the proposed improvements.



The recommendations outlined are provided as guidance to support SPSA's internal consideration of potential actions related to wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and response. They are designed to inform internal discussion, planning, and prioritization, rather than establishing mandatory requirements or directives. Recommendations include key actionable strategies that will support the overall recommendation.

SPSA retains full responsibility for evaluating these recommendations and strategies in the context of its operational environment, governance structures, resource availability, and risk tolerance. Any implementation decisions, including scope, sequencing, and resourcing, should be determined by the SPSA.

The following recommendations should be considered as actionable inputs for the SPSA's decision-making and continuous improvement, with final responsibility for adoption and modification, and should be implemented only where deemed appropriate by SPSA.

## Recommendation 1: Review the SPSA’s Structure to Ensure Organizational Alignment with Mandates as the Provincial Emergency Coordinator, Wildfire Management, and Emergency Dispatch



Cross-jurisdictional research demonstrates that Saskatchewan is the only Canadian province with an organization responsible for both provincial emergency management and wildfire management. In addition to this dual core mandate, SPSA is also responsible for overseeing the provincial emergency dispatch system. SPSA’s broad mandate, while updated in 2019, has contributed to a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Several legacy processes, leadership structures, and job descriptions continue to overlap, contributing to redundancy, unclear responsibilities, and inconsistent collaboration across departments. These issues have led to siloed operations, duplicated work, missed opportunities for improvement, and reduced engagement among front-line staff, who report feeling excluded from decision-making processes.

Reviewing the organizational structure of the SPSA will help define core functions, streamline governance, and ensure staffing and structures align with the Agency’s provincial responsibilities. The intended outcome is to strengthen mission clarity across its three lines of service, strong lines of accountability, and a mandate that supports cohesive operations across its wildfire, emergency management, and emergency dispatch responsibilities.

### Actionable Strategies

- Complete a comprehensive organizational and functional review of the SPSA’s current mandates and determine whether the dual or multi-mandate model is appropriate and, if so, what governance, operational, and culture improvements are required to ensure it is successful. The review should consider:
  - Enhancing governance and ministerial oversight of SPSA
  - Leading national practices and alternative structures from other jurisdictions’ emergency management and wildfire management agencies,
  - Reviewing the roles of the PEOC and PRC.
  - How collaboration could be fostered across the Government of Saskatchewan and with municipal, industry, and non-governmental organization partners.
  - Appropriate executive and management spans of controls.

- Enhance the governance and ministerial oversight of the SPSA by fully appointing a skill-based board to oversee SPSA, as enabled by the *Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency Act*.
- Work with the Minister under the *Emergency Planning Act* to appoint an interim Chief of Emergency Management who has appropriate ICS training and experience. Review qualifications from other provincial emergency management agencies to facilitate the selection of a candidate with the most appropriate credentials for the role. This should be established as a permanent role in the medium-term, and not only appointed for specific events.
- Define and communicate leadership roles, reporting relationships, and accountabilities for the 2025 Wildfire Season, including the role of the PEOC and the role of the PRC.
- Prioritize clear, timely communication of leadership roles, reporting relationships, and key responsibilities to all SPSA staff before the start of the 2026 Wildfire Season.
- Launch a focused change management initiative to support staff through upcoming operational changes, ensuring everyone is informed and engaged as new processes are introduced for this fire season.
- Facilitate open channels for frontline feedback and questions, so staff feel heard and supported during the transition.
- Update job descriptions, competencies, and reporting lines to reflect the current mandates. This includes ensuring that all legislatively required positions (e.g. Chief of Emergency Management) are documented and well understood internally and with key interestholders.
- Following the comprehensive organizational and functional review, adopt the recommendations related to governance and leadership structures to streamline decision-making and enhance effectiveness across the SPSA's mandate(s).
- Concurrently with the redesign of governance and leadership structures, implement a formal change management program and strengthen cross-functional collaboration and integrated planning across the SPSA's mandate(s).
- Pending the outcome of the comprehensive review, move to transition to the identified future state of the SPSA's operating model.
- Align workforce planning, leadership development, and succession planning with SPSA's confirmed mandate(s).
- Embed collaboration and shared accountability into performance management and organizational culture.
- Monitor organizational effectiveness and staff engagement to support continuous improvement.

## Recommendation 2: Strengthen Internal Emergency Management Coordination and Structure within SPSA and the Government of Saskatchewan



SPSA’s broader emergency management functions require clearer structure, stronger internal coordination, and consistent activation protocols. Role ambiguity, unclear escalation pathways, and outdated or missing SOPs contributed to delays, confusion, and bottlenecks during the incident response. These findings highlight unclear roles, non-integrated reporting lines, and a perception that emergency management receives less focus than wildfire operations.

Despite widespread ICS training among SPSA staff, practical application remains limited because emergency tabletop exercises are infrequent, and not fully integrated across communities, agencies, and external partners. As a result, roles are not well practiced, coordination challenges persist, and teams are not fully prepared for complex or multi-agency incidents.

A structured, province-wide emergency management exercise program is needed and should be delivered at provincial, regional/community, and internal levels. This will allow the SPSA and its collaborators to test procedures, strengthen communication pathways, and identify gaps before real events occur.

Strengthening emergency management coordination and structure will improve activation clarity, streamline decision-making, and ensure that all hazards, not just wildfire, receive the necessary attention. The intended outcome is a well-practiced, whole-of-province emergency management system where municipal and Indigenous communities, provincial staff, and external partners operate confidently, consistently, and collaboratively under pressure.

### Actionable Strategies

- Review the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) activation and coordination protocol that defines specific triggers, assigned roles, and briefing cadence. Communicate the policy within the SPSA, GoS, Municipalities, and external partners.
- Deliver briefings to staff and relevant external partners to reinforce reporting lines, escalation pathways, and decision authorities, and publish the finalized escalation map on the SPSA intranet.
- Develop and approve a cross-agency and cross-government coordination framework that defines roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, resource-sharing protocols, information-flow requirements, and governance expectations.

- Implement a standardized SPSA leadership and GoS ministries briefing templates for all significant events, capturing status, risks, decision requests, and key messages.
- Enhance preparation capacity and engage a third-party facilitator to deliver a whole-of-Agency emergency tabletop exercise as soon as possible ensuring inclusion of all divisions, branches, teams.
- Establish and schedule recurring readiness meetings that reviews interdependencies, risks, and outstanding actions, and assign accountable owners with tracked deadlines.
- Engage a third-party facilitator to deliver a multi-agency joint exercise with GoS, industry, municipal and Indigenous partners to enhance knowledge and coordination. This process is intended to be conducted on an annual basis.
- Launch an emergency management training pathway covering ICS roles, PEOC functions, information management, and decision logging for SPSA staff.
- Review the *Provincial Emergency Management Plan* to update and standardize government-wide incident procedures, including role assignment, accountability expectations, and escalation rules. Require all program areas to integrate them into internal SOPs.
- Implement a tracking system that monitors PEOC activations, decision timeliness, resource movement, and exercise outcomes, and report metrics annually to SPSA leadership.
- Conduct a Canada-wide jurisdictional scan of comparable-sized agencies to identify leading practices for tabletop exercises and integrate findings into the next pre-season training cycle.
- Design and implement a provincial emergency coordination structure with defined governance mechanisms, minimum staffing requirements, and standardized SOPs, and formally adopt it as the scalable model for multi-incident and complex events.
- Ensure all systems and practices, including training cycles, ICS alignment requirements, cross-agency coordination protocols, and tabletop schedules, by embedding SPSA in policy, training programs, and multi-agency exercise calendar.

### Recommendation 3: Improve Integration and Coordination Between the SPSA and Communities, Other Government of Saskatchewan Ministries, Agencies, and Crown Corporations



Saskatchewan’s emergency and wildfire management system depends on seamless cooperation across communities, ministries, Crown Corporations, and agencies. *The Provincial Emergency Management Plan* outlines the requirements for a whole government approach to emergency management, yet current coordination is fragmented and inconsistent. Additionally, Saskatchewan has a significant number of small, rural, and/or remote communities that lack adequate capacity to properly support emergency and wildfire management preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery needs and require varying levels of support from the Province. The themes of unclear roles, jurisdictional authority, limited information sharing, and siloed decision-making was emphasized by communities, SPSA staff, and other GoS staff across the Province.

This recommendation aims to establish structured, predictable cross-organizational coordination that clarifies responsibilities, strengthens shared situational awareness, and enables a unified approach across prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The intended outcome is a more coherent provincial emergency management system where multiple partners work from common processes, speak a shared operational language, and mobilize efficiently before and during critical events.

This is especially important during mass evacuations where interestholders highlighted operations appeared to lack coordinated planning, reliable demographic information, or clear communication between host communities, the SPSA, and partners. Strengthening evacuation planning and coordination will address these gaps by establishing standardized templates, improving data sharing, and clarifying roles across organizations including communities with varying resources and capacities. The intended outcome is a predictable, equitable evacuation system that ensures communities receive timely support, host communities are prepared, and evacuees have access to the services they need.

#### Actionable Strategies

- Issue a formal internal cross-government communication package to each GoS Ministry, Agency, and Crown Corporation that clearly defines SPSA’s mandate, including responsibilities that fall outside SPSA’s scope, and which may fall to other cross-government organizations. This should align with the PEMP.

- Issue a formal external public communication package for the public including communities that clearly defines the SPSA's mandate, including responsibilities that fall outside of the SPSA's scope, and which may be the responsibilities of communities or other non-governmental organizations. This should align with the PEMP.
- Develop and publish a cross-department contact directory that includes primary contacts, alternates, and their emergency roles; require incident teams to use this directory for all operational coordination.
- Distribute a standardized summary of PEMP responsibilities to all GoS Ministries, Agencies, and Crown Corporations, and require Deputy Ministers or equivalents to confirm internal dissemination.
- Implement the pre-season and incident briefing template for the SPSA and other Ministries, Agencies, and Crowns so leadership receives uniform information across the province.
- Establish cross-government integration meetings with a fixed membership list, a standing agenda, and a shared action-tracking system; assign clear owners and deadlines for every decision, risk, and interdependency to ensure follow-through and closure.
- Develop a provincial registry or database outlining community capacity, including resources and trained staff, to support emergency and wildfire management initiatives across the Province.
- Work with the Ministry of Government Relations and Ministry of Community Safety to review the potential creation of emergency planning districts under the *Emergency Planning Act* to support regional emergency management planning among local authorities.
- Work with the Ministry of Government Relations to review and enhance the ESO program and understand opportunities to further support municipal governments to enhance their preparedness, planning, and capacity to respond.
- Work with the Northern Saskatchewan Administrative District (NSAD) to:
  - Clarify roles and authorities between SPSA, ESOs, and NMS in unincorporated areas, particularly for evacuation and re-entry decisions.
  - More intentionally integrate NMS into wildfire planning, response, and recovery as a northern coordination partner and subject matter expert.
  - Strengthen communication approaches for remote and unincorporated areas to ensure timely, consistent information for residents.
  - Improve alignment on evacuation and compliance practices to reduce mixed messaging and support responder safety.
  - Assess options to strengthen surge capacity and coordination mechanisms to support NSAD during large-scale or prolonged wildfire events
- Work with the ECS program and communities to develop a roadmap for future one-off financial payments, including clarifying roles and responsibilities on financial distribution, location for financial distribution, and appropriate checks and balances to confirm eligibility.

- Establish a standardized approach to tracking the number of FTEs and staff temporarily reassigned from regular duties to support emergency response activities, to improve workforce visibility and capacity planning.
- Develop a clear process for maintaining, verifying, or supporting the updating of Community Preparedness Plans.
- Deploy a secure, shared digital workspace (SharePoint or Synology) that houses operational information, contact lists, briefings, situational updates, and shared documents; require all ministries, agencies, and Crown Corporations to use it during preparedness and incident operations.
- Publish an integration roadmap that outlines milestones, governance responsibilities, modernization initiatives, and required cross-government commitments, and review progress with the interagency committee.
- Conduct a structured review and update of the PEMP, ensuring the cross-government coordination framework (roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, resource-sharing protocols, and information flows) reflects current organizational structures and operational realities.
- Establish an interagency coordination committee with a formal charter, defined decision-making authority, membership requirements, operating procedures, and a review cycle to ensure cross-government emergency coordination remains consistent and accountable.

## Recommendation 4: Strengthen Fire Behaviour Modeling and Risk Mapping



Saskatchewan’s fire behaviour models and risk maps are outdated, inconsistently maintained, and not effectively integrated into operational planning. Findings highlighted gaps in data quality, age of base layers, lack of identifying values at risk, and uneven staff training, which collectively limit forecasting accuracy and strategic decision-making.

Strengthening modelling and mapping processes will enable more accurate risk identification, better resource allocation, and improved planning at provincial, regional, and community levels. The intended outcome is a modernized, scientifically credible risk-mapping system that provides the actionable insights needed to support prevention, readiness, and real-time wildfire response across the province and inclusive of various interestholders including the forestry industry.

### Actionable Strategies

- Assign clear accountability within the SPSA for fire behaviour modeling and risk mapping by designating a lead role responsible for oversight of forest fuels data, weather inputs, and modeling outputs, and for coordinating with operational staff.
- Conduct an immediate review of existing forest fuel spatial data and identify known gaps related to recent disturbances, including wildfire, insect and disease impacts, and timber harvesting, using available provincial and industry data sources.
- Establish a standard process and documentation for annual spatial updates of impacted areas and define interim responsibilities for maintaining data currency during the wildfire season.
- Review the current provincial weather station network by confirming maintenance requirements with suppliers, validating maintenance records, and conducting field checks to ensure stations meet siting standards.
- Assign a Fire Behaviour Analyst (FBAN) to work with meteorologists and operational staff to identify areas where weather stations may not accurately represent local conditions and where data gaps may be affecting fire behaviour forecasts.
- Develop a coordinated provincial approach for maintaining and updating forest mapping, aligned with timber inventory updates and other scheduled land-base reviews, to ensure modeling inputs remain current and consistent.
- Assess the adequacy and spatial distribution of the weather station network, and where required, relocate existing stations or install additional stations to better reflect localized weather conditions, with priority given to high-value areas across the province.

- Review current fire behaviour modeling tools and practices used by the SPSA, including a scan of tools used by other provincial wildfire agencies, to identify opportunities to improve accuracy and operational relevance.
- Strengthen internal capacity by delivering targeted training and knowledge sharing for operational staff on the interpretation and use of fire behaviour models and risk maps.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment to implement a coordinated provincial approach for maintaining and updating forest mapping.
- Establish a sustained, province-wide fire behaviour modeling and risk mapping program with refresh cycles, and quality assurance processes for forest fuels, weather data, and modeling outputs.
- Integrate fire behaviour modeling and risk mapping outputs into core SPSA decision-making processes, including wildfire mitigation and preparedness planning, fuel management prioritization, and operational response, to ensure informed and consistent decision-making.

## Recommendation 5: Strengthen the Fuel Management Program through Site-Specific Prescriptions, Post-Treatment Monitoring, and Collaboration with External Partners



Effective wildfire mitigation requires more than broad, one-size-fits-all treatments; it demands a scientifically grounded, site-specific approach based on an understanding of accumulated risk and supported by strong monitoring and coordinated partnerships. This recommendation responds to findings that current fuel-management prescriptions are outdated, inconsistently applied, and rarely assessed for effectiveness. Additionally, findings show that seasonal staffing levels and limited year-round capacity constrain Saskatchewan’s ability to plan, supervise, and deliver high-quality fuel-management activities.

Strengthening the SPSA’s fuel management program will ensure fuel treatments are tailored to ecological conditions, tracked through robust monitoring, and aligned across agencies, Indigenous partners, industry, and municipalities. The intended outcome is a proactive, climate-resilient mitigation system that reduces risk to communities, increases program credibility, and improves long-term wildfire resilience.

### Actionable Strategies

- Review all existing fuel management training currently used across the province to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities for standardization.
- Establish a standardized reporting process for all fuel management projects, including clear criteria, and targeted outcomes.
- Compile all historical and current fuel management project data into a compatible format for SPSA dispatch and response systems. Establish expectations for timely communication between SPSA and municipalities when new work is undertaken.
- Conduct a science-based review of current fuel mitigation targets to clarify how they were established and assess their alignment with accumulated risk, fire behaviour modelling, and community- and landscape-level exposure.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment to review, and potentially update, provincial fuel management targets to reflect recent wildfire activity and risk awareness. Prairie Resilience Strategy and Climate Resilience Measurement Framework.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry Industry, and other partners to align on the understanding of the relationship between fuel mitigation work and forest protection and

complete the design of a five-year provincial fuel management strategy, informed by available funding, staffing levels, and priority risk areas.

- This should also include a review of the need for SPSA to pay fees for tree removal under the Forest Resources Management Regulation.
- Work with Government of Saskatchewan ministries and partners to share data and update forest hazard and risk maps, including the identification of values at risk, to better inform fuel management plans.
- Develop case studies for fuel management areas that were affected by recent fires or used for operational objectives such as firefighter safety and access. Ensure each case study addresses fuels, weather, and topography.
- Develop future mitigation plans incorporating firebreak strategies, ensuring they are evidence informed and grounded in fuel science principles.
- Begin developing a provincial fuel management training program that establishes foundational competencies.
- Work with the Ministry of Environment, the forestry industry, and other partners to design and pilot a standardized, long-term monitoring framework for fuel management projects that establishes clear criteria and outcomes.
  - The monitoring framework should include consistent evaluation through an assessment committee, track effectiveness and accumulated wildfire risk, and regularly revisit sites to confirm post-treatment results.
- Implement (or enhance) a provincially supported FireSmart program which includes funding for industry and community-based initiatives and building awareness and engagement for individuals
- Implement mandatory provincial fuel management training for all relevant staff, supported by standardized curriculum, evaluation, and certification requirements.
- Launch the long-term monitoring framework that includes revisiting fuel management sites to confirm that objectives and post-treatment outcomes remain valid.
- Implement the five-year provincial fuel management strategy, informed by monitoring data, available funding, staffing levels, and priority risk areas.
- Fully integrate all fuel management monitoring and project data into SPSA spatial systems and ensure ongoing communication protocols are established and followed for SPSA and municipal work.

## Recommendation 6: Advance Workforce Planning and Training Schedules to Before the Wildfire Season



Recruitment, training and onboarding begin late, often after the fire season has already started. This results in rushed, compressed preparation for new SPSA staff and added strain on experienced staff. These workforce and training challenges reduce operational reliability, slow decision-making, disrupt critical functions, and limit the organization’s ability to maintain consistent service levels or scale effectively during peak periods or emergencies.

Additionally, SPSA staff identified areas indicating potential understaffing and a dependence on reactive surge staffing, which may result in gaps in role continuity and operational vulnerability during periods when key personnel are unavailable. Insights from engagement suggest that staff resources are strained, contributing to increased burnout and turnover rates, thereby diminishing overall capacity.

Addressing these challenges would improve staffing stability, ensure SPSA staff are trained before peak demand, and reduce burnout and turnover. The SPSA would gain stronger readiness, more reliable operations, faster decision-making, and an enhanced ability to maintain service levels and scale effectively during high-pressure periods.

### Actionable Strategies

- Initiate development of comprehensive workforce and staffing plans, including seasonal and permanent strategies and emergency roles.
- Identify critical roles for succession planning, document required competencies.
- Draft preliminary surge capacity protocols and standby arrangements for emergency staffing. Implement structured onboarding for surge and volunteer staff.
- Expand and standardize training curricula, schedules and competency assessments for all emergency response roles. This training should be offered to Government of Saskatchewan ministries as well as SPSA staff.
- Standardize SPSA executive and management leadership training, including technical expertise and people-management skills (trauma-informed practice and leadership, critical incident stress management, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution).
- Ensuring the requisite technical training is delivered to municipal and Government of Saskatchewan elected officials and administration.

- Pending the outcome of the full workforce and staffing plans, ensure the implementation of the plans.
- Build internal capacity and long-term team sustainability by establishing structured succession pathways that support advancement, intentional knowledge transfer, and targeted recruitment.
- Formalize surge capacity protocols – finalize standby pools, agreements and pre-approval processes, integrate surge plans into operational readiness frameworks.
- Advance early recruitment planning to begin in the fall to ensure there is enough time to recruit, hire, onboard, and train staff prior to the start of the wildfire season.
- Implement a modern learning management system that offers up-to-date information on training records and to monitor qualifications.
- Implement long-term recruitment and retention strategies for remote/high-risk areas, including addressing housing, amenities, and year-round employment options.
- Evaluate and refine the staffing, succession, and surge plans annually.
- Integrate extended training programs into a permanent annual cycle.

## Recommendation 7: Proactively Initiate Procurement and Contracting Processes Before the Wildfire Season Starts



Procurement delays and late-season contracting hinder the SPSA’s ability to secure resources when they are most needed. Interestholders cited lengthy processes, inconsistent documentation, and a lack of pre-qualified vendors as major contributors to operational slowdowns.

Strengthening procurement and contract management, especially through pre-season planning and vendor prequalification, will support faster mobilization, clearer expectations for suppliers, and more reliable surge capacity. The intended outcome is a streamlined, predictable procurement system that enables timely access to critical supplies, equipment, and contracted support before the wildfire season begins.

### Actionable Strategies

- Create and publish a pre-season contracting schedule for all time-critical categories, with fixed submission deadlines, assigned responsibilities, and required templates so teams can prepare statements of work and evaluation panels in advance.
- Consolidate all contractor and vendor lists from communities, regional offices, and external partners into a single master vendor database and publish it for Government of Saskatchewan-wide use.
- Establish and launch a formal vendor pre-qualification program with clear eligibility standards, documentation requirements, and a renewal cycle, enabling rapid purchasing from vetted suppliers during emergencies.
- Negotiate multi-year agreements for critical procurement categories that include capacity guarantees, pricing protections, and performance incentives, ensuring predictable seasonal readiness and reduced administrative workload.
- Begin vendor performance evaluations using a standardized scorecard and document corrective action requirements.

## Recommendation 8: Improve Equipment Management and Equipment Recovery



Wildfire and emergency response teams need to rely on equipment systems that are accurate, reliable, and ready, yet current inventory tracking, maintenance routines, and vendor arrangements are inconsistent and often incomplete. SPSA staff reported difficulty locating equipment, gaps in condition records, and delays caused by outdated or missing asset information. Improving equipment management will ensure timely availability, safer operations, and fewer logistical barriers during peak season. A recurring issue raised by SPSA staff was the inconsistent and often incomplete recovery of equipment after incidents. Losses, unreturned items, and damaged assets were commonplace, thus reducing readiness for subsequent fires.

Integrating a formalized equipment recovery process is essential to maintain asset availability and safeguard public investment. The intended outcome is a transparent, standardized, provincewide equipment system that strengthens operational readiness, reduces downtime during emergencies, and ensures timely equipment recovery following deployment.

### Actionable Strategies

- Begin and complete a comprehensive count of all equipment to update system records, including serial numbers, asset condition, serviceability status, and storage location. This inventory will establish the baseline data required for future asset management and lifecycle planning.
- Define province-wide requirements for who signs equipment out, when custody transfers occur, and how recovery is confirmed, regardless of incident size. Chain-of-custody expectations should apply when equipment changes hands in the field and be supported through simple notification or verification processes.
- Mandate confirmation of equipment returns, damage, or loss within incident demobilization documentation. Implement clear steps to ensure all crews complete and submit this documentation prior to departing an incident.
- Introduce standardized maintenance schedules that specify inspection steps, service intervals, and responsible technicians, with completion required prior to the wildfire season to ensure operational readiness.

- Implement a consistent asset management tool (even if initially minimal) that records equipment availability, location, service history, and condition. Provide training for depot and field users to ensure consistent adoption and accountability.
- Conduct preseason readiness inspections of all critical assets, publish inspection results, and enforce follow-up corrective actions before operational periods begin.
- Establish a centralized equipment-recovery coordination function responsible for tracking outstanding assets, issuing follow-up notices, and maintaining province-wide recovery metrics.
- Explore non-financial or operational incentives that reinforce timely equipment return and accurate reporting of damaged or lost assets, supporting a culture of shared accountability.
- Formalize equipment recovery expectations with regional and frontline leads, including clear return-rate targets, reporting, and defined penalties or escalation procedures for non-returned items.
- Develop an equipment replacement and surge-procurement forecast using lifecycle data and condition assessments so leadership can proactively plan for high-risk failures and peak-season demand.
- Develop a long-range capital replacement strategy that prioritizes critical equipment categories, establishes purchasing targets, and incorporates lifecycle costing to maintain operational readiness and firefighter safety.
- Integrate a continuous improvement cycle into equipment management, requiring analysis of performance metrics, after-action reviews, recovery rates, failure trends, and user feedback to drive updates to policies, tools, and training programs.
- Implement a formal post-incident equipment recovery and reconciliation protocol, including detailed reporting requirements, audit schedules, and standardized metrics (e.g., recovery rate, loss rate, repair turnaround time) to provide transparent, measurable oversight.

## Recommendation 9: Develop a Provincial Recovery Strategy Including Disaster Social Recovery Framework



Recovery efforts in Saskatchewan are currently ad hoc, lacking clear frameworks, dedicated governance, and consistent integration across social, economic, environmental, and housing supports. Findings emphasized gaps in coordination and the absence of a provincial recovery vision that reflects community needs.

Developing a provincial recovery strategy will guide communities, agencies, and partners toward a structured, holistic, and sustainable approach to post-disaster recovery. The intended outcome is a modern recovery system that prioritizes social wellbeing, supports long-term community resilience, and provides clear direction after major events.

### Actionable Strategies

- Create a recovery roadmap identifying all recovery partners and services including ministries, agencies, crowns, NGOs, Indigenous authorities, federal programs, and local supports. Analyze for gaps and identify where coordination needs to be strengthened and where services are missing or duplicated.
- Create a standardized community recovery plan template, including examples, checklists, and step-by-step guidance for communities to utilize.
- Review the evacuee tracking system to determine how to improve it and increase efficiencies with the program.
- Compile all prior recovery programs, funding streams, eligibility criteria, application steps, timelines, and contact points to analyze for program consistency.
- Develop and formalize a Provincial Recovery Framework that includes considerations for social recovery and governance model that defines core recovery domains (e.g., housing, health, income, cultural supports), minimum service standards, and a coordinated recovery system; include clear roles and responsibilities, decision-making, escalation pathways, case management expectations, and data-sharing rules.
- Publish a comprehensive provincial recovery strategy that integrates long-term social, economic, infrastructure, and environmental recovery components; include progress-tracking methods, required reporting, and long-term monitoring expectations to ensure recovery stays on course.

- Establish a permanent Recovery Advisory Committee with clearly defined membership, meeting cycles, terms of reference, and a requirement to publish recommendations so community and interestholder voices to shape ongoing recovery policy.

## Recommendation 10: Advance a Culture of Continuous Improvement Through Consistent and Structured After-Action Reviews

				
<b>Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation</b>	<b>Wildfire Readiness and Preparedness</b>	<b>Wildfire &amp; Emergency Response</b>	<b>Evacuation Assessment</b>	<b>Recovery Strategy</b>

SPSA staff reported that post-event debriefs and after-action reviews were conducted inconsistently and that lessons learned were not systematically captured, tracked, or incorporated into future operations. Without a structured approach, institutional learning can be lost season over season.

Implementing a continuous improvement framework will ensure that incident-specific insights are documented, shared, and acted upon, thereby strengthening readiness and response over time. The intended outcome is an organizational culture where lessons are routinely captured, changes are implemented, and performance improves year after year.

### Actionable Strategies

- Develop an incident file storage and organization policy that can be applied to any incident and that enables staff to save operational documentation as the incident unfolds. This will allow for the easy access of documentation for conducting after-action reviews.
- Working within the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre Policy, establish standardized information-sharing mechanisms for situational awareness within the SPSA and with GoS ministries.
- Review existing Incident Action Plan (IAP) templates to identify gaps and misalignment with field operations. Ensure continuous feedback loop between field operations and IAP for future planning.
- Introduce a basic real-time incident update process. Identify key external partners and establish preliminary coordination channels.
- Begin a process of completing and recording regular after-action debriefs, not just the annual operations debrief meeting.
- Develop an After-Action Review policy that outlines the thresholds and triggers for when to complete internal after-action reviews versus engaging a third-party reviewer and includes timelines for when these should be completed.
- Implement shared platforms (e.g., dashboards) to support unified planning and a common operating picture.
- Standardize the use of shared templates, communication trees, and reporting cycles.

- Link IAPs directly to field activity logs to support accountability and real time updates.
- Introduce audit and compliance mechanisms to ensure plans (e.g., IAPs, SOPs, other operational plans, etc.) are followed.
- Finalize and operationalize joint protocols, MOUs, and decision log processes with partners.
- Implement fully operational collaborative planning platforms that support shared situational awareness, joint problem-solving, and aligned operational objectives.
- Conduct system-wide evaluations of communication and information-sharing protocols, upgrading tools and platforms where needed.
- Integrate multi-year lessons learned into finalized standards, guidelines, and SOPs.
- Consider technological solutions to support better real-time sharing of data, information, and situational awareness to support field operations.
- Conduct shared after-action reviews with partners, supported by integrated improvement plans and tracked actions.

## Recommendation 11: Foster Positive Organizational Culture and Improve Availability of Psychological Health Supports

 <p><b>Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation</b></p>	 <p><b>Wildfire Readiness and Preparedness</b></p>	 <p><b>Wildfire &amp; Emergency Response</b></p>	 <p><b>Evacuation Assessment</b></p>	 <p><b>Recovery Strategy</b></p>
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The SPSA is encouraged to take direct action to further strengthen psychological safety, enhance the availability and visibility of mental health supports, and nurture a more collaborative and inclusive organizational culture. Staff shared that high stress incidents can sometimes make it challenging to access proactive supports; while many do utilize internal mental health resources, there remains a tendency to also rely on informal peer networks. This indicates an opportunity to build greater awareness and trust in the supports already in place. In addition, siloed operations, occasional cultural tensions between departments, and inconsistent information sharing have at times affected teamwork, morale, and overall organizational cohesion. Staff expressed a desire for more direct engagement with leadership and for staff expertise to be more consistently recognized and valued.

Collectively, these factors can affect workforce resilience, team relationships, and the organization’s overall effectiveness in high-pressure situations. Addressing these areas in a coordinated manner—integrating mental health support, culture-building, and leadership involvement, will help to foster a supportive, cohesive, and high-performing environment. By prioritizing psychological safety alongside inclusive culture initiatives, SPSA can strengthen workforce resilience, enhance morale, and ensure all staff feel valued and empowered to contribute to organizational success.

### Actionable Strategies

*Regarding psychological health and safety:*

- Proactively communicate and ensure access to all available mental health supports (EFAP, PSPNET, CISM, contracted clinicians), particularly during active response periods.
- Introduce trauma-informed engagement practices and psychological safety protocols for all staff, with particular focus on those involved in ECS delivery and other high stress operations.
- Establish regular wellness check-ins, post-event debriefs, and resilience conversations as standard leadership practices to reduce cumulative stress and normalize help-seeking.
- Normalize participation in wellness and resilience activities by embedding them into routine operations rather than positioning them as optional or reactive supports.

- Implement a structured psychological readiness self-assessment tool to support staff returning to high stress roles and emergency services.
- Develop a formal, stepwise workplace reintegration process for staff returning after high stress events, emergency response deployments, or extended leave related to stress or trauma.
- Develop standardized, trauma-informed leadership training, to ensure leaders have the competencies required to support both operational performance and psychological safety.
- Implement annual, confidential mental health check-ins with a clinician for all staff, regardless of role or recent activation, to support early intervention and normalize ongoing mental health maintenance.
- Fully institutionalize wellness check-ins and resilience training by embedding them into policy, training calendars, and role expectations across all departments.

*Regarding organizational culture:*

- Strengthen cross-departmental collaboration and regular communication to reduce silos and support unified planning and decision-making.
- Recognize and acknowledge staff dedication, discretionary effort, and resilience to continue to improve morale and reinforce a positive workplace culture.
- Promote transparency and consistent communication to build trust between leadership and staff.
- Address leadership disconnect and interpersonal conflict through targeted leadership development and team-based interventions.
- Create structured opportunities for staff input into decision-making, such as working groups, advisory committees, or formal feedback loops.
- Embed inclusive leadership behaviours (openness, transparency, shared decision-making) into leadership development expectations and practices.
- Update the Occupational Health and Safety Manual to address psychological hazards associated with wildfire and incident response work, including measures to prevent and respond to psychological injury, cumulative stress, and exposure to traumatic events.
- Embed cross-departmental collaboration and information sharing expectations into organizational policies, norms and performance management expectations.
- Monitor and reinforce leadership competency standards through performance evaluation and ongoing leadership development cycles.



## 8.0 Conclusion

The 2025 Wildfire Season placed the SPSA in an extraordinary operating environment, characterized by prolonged drought, periods of extreme fire behaviour, and multiple significant fires occurring at the same time. With hundreds of wildfires, millions of hectares burned, and large-scale evacuations, the pace and concurrency of events stretched people, systems, and logistics beyond what is typically required in a single-incident response. In these conditions, the commitment and effort demonstrated by SPSA staff, community leaders, responders, Indigenous partners, provincial ministries, and external supporting organizations were essential to protecting lives and supporting affected communities.

At the same time, the 2025 Wildfire Season placed Saskatchewan's wildfire and emergency management system under significant strain due to extreme, but reasonably foreseeable, conditions after consecutive years of extreme wildfire seasons in Canada. In doing so, the 2025 Wildfire Season revealed clear opportunities for improvement, many of which reflect latent, pre-existing systemic issues that were exposed or intensified by the severity of the season, rather than caused by it. Findings point to the need for a more risk- and science-informed prevention and mitigation framework that is grounded in accumulated wildfire risk and supported by sufficient capacity and inter-agency coordination. More consistent readiness is also required through earlier workforce planning, training, contracting, and pre-season exercises.

During response, the scale and concurrence of simultaneous incidents amplified the impacts of unclear roles, uneven application of incident management structures, and inconsistent information flow, underscoring the importance of a clearly defined and consistently operated provincial coordination model. Evacuation experiences reinforced the need for standardized triggers and communications, stronger host-community coordination, and modernized emergency community support processes that can scale during high-volume events.

Recovery similarly emerged as an area for growth: the absence of a clearly articulated provincial recovery strategy created uncertainty for communities and partners as operations transitioned from response to longer term rebuilding and support, contributing to ad hoc and inconsistent recovery efforts.

The recommendations in this report set out a practical path to translate lessons from an unprecedented season into sustained improvement. They emphasize clarifying mandates and governance, enhancing coordination and capability across communities and government, modernizing tools and processes, and supporting workforce wellbeing. Implemented collectively, these actions position the SPSA, and Saskatchewan more broadly, to strengthen a more resilient, integrated emergency management system, better equipped for increasingly complex wildfire seasons ahead.



## 9.0 Appendices

## Appendix A: Survey Design and Methodology

To best understand the experiences and corroborate findings in this Report, MNP administered two voluntary surveys. The first was a public survey that was open to members of the public and targeted individuals affected by the 2025 Wildfire Season. The second was an internal SPSA survey, targeting SPSA staff involved in the 2025 Wildfire Season. The survey had various question types, leading to both quantitative and qualitative insights. The public survey conducted as part of this Review was not designed to produce statistically representative results. Instead, it served as a tool to gather general public sentiment and qualitative insights to help inform the project's direction.

### Survey Design and Administration

Survey questions were designed to capture insights related to prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, evacuation, communications, and organizational structure as applicable. Survey questions were drafted by MNP with input from SPSA.

Both surveys were administered electronically using the online survey platform SimpleSurvey. The Government of Saskatchewan distributed a public press release<sup>35</sup> to raise awareness of the survey being open for public participation. The internal survey was distributed by SPSA leadership to all SPSA staff.

Both surveys were open from December 19, 2025, to January 30, 2026.

Participation in both surveys was voluntary, and respondents were able to skip questions or select "prefer not to say" on each question. As a result, the number of responses per question varied by response. Survey questions utilized a mix of tools, including Likert-scale, multiple-choice, and open-text boxes.

The public survey utilized survey logic to pose questions to specific demographics and capture key information related to those demographics. The logic was based on two main questions, with respondents indicating their role during the wildfire response (e.g. community member, member of a First Nation, DEM, or CAO) in Question 7 and indicating the impact on their community (e.g. evacuated or host) in Question 11. Depending on the response to these questions, survey respondents received targeted questions to capture as much relevant information as possible. The internal survey did not require survey logic, with all respondents receiving every question.

In total, the Public Survey received 1,388 responses with a survey completion rate of 69.8%. The Internal Survey received 145 responses with a completion rate of 72.4%.

### Survey Analysis

Quantitative survey data was analyzed descriptively. Results are presented as frequencies and percentages based on the number of valid responses to each question. Because questions were not mandatory, denominators differ across questions, and percentages only reflect the portion of

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<sup>35</sup> Government of Saskatchewan Survey Press Release. December 19, 2025. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2025/december/19/public-survey-open-for-independent-review-of-2025-sk-wildfire-season>

responses to that question. When conducting analysis for the purpose of analyzing attitudes, respondents who selected “Neutral” or “Prefer not to say” were removed from the total.

All long-form survey respondents were compiled and sorted by question in order to conduct qualitative survey analysis. This analysis was conducted using Copilots Analyst Agent, following a hybrid inductive-deductive code approach, which took into account the attitude of the response (i.e. positive, neutral, or negative feedback). This process included Copilot cleaning the data and conducting thematic coding across all responses. More than one code could be applied to a response in the event that multiple thoughts or issues were brought up. Themes were then compiled into a defensible codebook to capture the overall trend of frequency of a theme arising. Copilot then used this information to generate theme summaries and produce qualitative percentages that reflect the proportion of valid responses which reference the theme at least once. The denominator for generating this percentage is the total number of valid responses for that particular question.

### Survey Limitations

The survey findings should be interpreted considering several important limitations.

First, the surveys were voluntary with respondents self-selecting to participate and are therefore not designed to be representative of the broader population. Individuals with particularly positive or negative experiences may be more likely to respond, introducing the potential for self-selection bias. Further, there was no randomization or weighting applied, meaning that results are not designed to be statistically significant. Quantitative results are meant to provide to the discourse but are not assumed to be representative and therefore no inferences are able to be made.

Second, as the survey questions were not mandatory, the number of valid responses therefore differed across each question.

Accordingly, survey results should be interpreted through this lens, with no inferences being made but rather using results to support and contextualize broader findings, rather than providing standalone evidence.

## Appendix B: Detailed Timelines of Spotlight Fires

### Timeline of the SHOE FIRE – 25LF

Week Starting	Fire Season 2025															
	May				June					July				August		
	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17
<b>WOLF Fire</b>																
May 19, 2025: Fire Reported																
May to July 26, 2025: Not contained																
May 22, 2025: McIlveena Mine Site evacuated.																
May 29, 2025: Evacuation for Jan Lake																
June 3, 2025: Denare Beach Protection Base has called for a full camp evacuation																
June 11, 2025: Evacuation for Flin Flon, Denare Beach, Creighton																
June 12, 2025: Jan Lake (repatriating June 12)																
June 13, 2025: Sturgeon Weir (repatriated June 10)																
June 20, 2025: Creighton P1's and P2's (P3's to repatriate June 22 beginning at 06:00)																
June 22, 2025: Denare Beach permanent residents with accommodations repatriating June 22																
June 23, 2025: Creighton P1's and P2's, Denare Beach P1's and P2's, (remainder of DB P3 residents to repatriate June 25), Flin Flon to repatriate June 25																
June 27, 2025: Some Denare Beach residents remain supported out of the community																
July 28, 2025: Contained																

## Timeline of WOLF FIRE – 25DB

Week Starting	Fire Season 2025															
	May				June					July				August		
	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17
<b>SHOE Fire</b>																
May 7, 2025: Fire Reported																
May to August, 2025: Not Contained																
May 9, 2025: Evacuation of Lower Fishing Lakes and Caribou Creek																
May 13, 2025: Evacuation of Piprell Lake																
May 21, 2025: Possible evacuation of East Trout Lake																
May 22, 2025: Evacuation of East Trout Lake																
May 23, 2025: Community of Whiteswan/Whelan Bay is on preevacuation alert																
May 24, 2025: Evacuation of Little Bear Lake																
May 26, 2025: Pre-Evacuation Alert for Whiteswan/Whelan Bay.																
May 28, 2025: Evacuation of Whiteswan/Whelan Bay.																
June 6, 2025: Voluntary evacuation Candle Lake & RM of Paddockwood Candle Lake Vicinity																
June 13, 2025: Piprell Lake (repatriated June 11), Little Bear Lake/Moosehorn (repatriated June 11), Lower Fishing Lake (repatriating June 13), Narrow Hills Provincial Park (repatriating June 13 at 17:00)																
June 20, 2025: Whiteswan/Whelan Bay (repatriating June 20, 16:00 hrs)																
August 14, 2025: Contained																

## Timeline PISEW FIRE – 25LA

Week Starting	Fire Season 2025															
	May				June					July				August		
	4	11	18	25	1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17
<b>PISEW Fire</b>																
May 21, 2025: Fire Reported																
May 27 to August 15, 2025: Not contained																
May 23, 2025: Hall Lake Community is on evacuation alert																
June 2, 2025: Evacuation for Nemeiben Lake, Sucker River, Wadin Bay																
June 3, 2025: Evacuation for Sikachu, Clam Crossing, La Ronge, Air Ronge, Lac La Ronge, Eagle Point, Potato Lake, Lamp Lake, Rabbit Creek																
June 10, 2025: Evacuation for Napatak, English Bay																
June 11, 2025: Evacuation for Stanley Mission Priority 1 and 2- (all to repatriate June 12)																
June 13, 2025: (all repatriated June 12, full repatriation by June 15)																
August 16, 2025: Fire Contained																

## Appendix C: Prioritization of Recommendations

Recommendation	Impact (H/M/L)	Feasibility (H/M/L)	Urgency (H/M/L)	Dependencies (H/M/L)	Priority (1-3)	Notes
Recommendation 1: Review the SPSA's Structure to Ensure Organizational Alignment with Mandates as the Provincial Emergency Coordinator, Wildfire Management, and Emergency Dispatch	High	High	High	High	1	This is foundational to the future success of the organization.
Recommendation 2: Deliver Regular Emergency Tabletop Exercises to Strengthen Internal Emergency Management Coordination and Structure	Medium	High	Low	Low	2	This should be done, but the SPSA managed the 2025 season without it. Will ultimately help with readiness in future seasons.
Recommendation 3: Strengthen Internal Emergency Management Coordination and Structure within SPSA and the Government of Saskatchewan	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	2	Response needs better coordination with less reliance on relationships vs systems and processes.
Recommendation 4: Strengthen Fire Behaviour Modeling and Risk Mapping	High	Medium	Medium	High	2	All of the data being used is old and unreliable - impacts safety in the province.
Recommendation 5: Strengthen Prevention and Mitigation Program through Science-Based Site-Specific Prescriptions, Post-Treatment Monitoring, and Collaboration with External Partners	High	High	High	Medium	1	This greatly impacts the safety of the province.
Recommendation 6: Advance Workforce Planning and Training Schedules to Before the Wildfire Season	High	High	Medium	Medium	1	Greatly impacts the readiness to respond to wildfire. Having the right people with the right skills at the right time is imperative for a

Recommendation	Impact (H/M/L)	Feasibility (H/M/L)	Urgency (H/M/L)	Dependencies (H/M/L)	Priority (1-3)	Notes
						service organization such as the SPSA.
Recommendation 7: Proactively Initiate Procurement and Contracting Processes Before the Wildfire Season Starts	High	High	High	Low	2	Proactively contracting vendors preserves relationships and saves time during response activities.
Recommendation 8: Improve Equipment Management and Equipment Recovery	High	High	High	High	1	Overall cost recovery and budgets would be impacted.
Recommendation 9: Develop a Provincial Recovery Strategy Including Disaster Social Recovery Framework	Medium	High	High	Medium	2	Lack of formal process inhibits activity.
Recommendation 10: Develop a Culture of Continuous Improvement by Prioritizing After-Action Reviews Across All Regions	High	Low	Medium	High	2	Leading practice to review what happened and make changes to have improved outcomes in future incidents.
Recommendation 11: Foster Positive Organizational Culture and Improve Availability of Psychological Health Supports	High	High	High	Low	1	This directly impacts the people providing services to the province.



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