

Wildfire status

Explaining the stages of wildfire management

Wildfire management

Alberta Wildfire is responsible for managing wildfires within the Forest Protection Area of Alberta. Outside of the Forest Protection Area, wildfire management is the responsibility of the relevant municipality, which may request assistance from Alberta Wildfire through a mutual aid agreement.

How do we fight wildfires?

Alberta Wildfire uses a variety of tools to fight wildfire, including detection resources, initial attack crews, aircraft, heavy equipment and sustained action firefighters. On large-scale wildfires, an Incident Management Team may be in place to manage wildfire containment and suppression.

What is wildfire status?

Alberta Wildfire uses specific terminology to explain the different levels of control of a wildfire. Wildfires are regularly assessed by experts and assigned a status to describe the behaviour of the wildfire, and how it is responding to suppression efforts under current and expected conditions.

Alberta Wildfire maintains a wildfire status webpage that reflects the current wildfire situation in real time. Wildfires are shown on an interactive map with information such as size, status, suspected cause, and initial date of assessment. This map draws information directly from the wildfire database and is refreshed every few minutes. The information comes from the fire centre in the local forest area, and is updated when they obtain new information.

Wildfire perimeter maps and sizes are entered by experts in the field and may change depending on factors such as weather conditions, significant growth or movement of the wildfire or a new more accurate assessment.

Wildfires will appear on the status map as either out of control (red), being held (yellow), under control (green) or mutual aid (blue).

A mutual aid wildfire is a wildfire outside of the Forest Protection Area that Alberta Wildfire is assisting with, but is not the lead agency. Because of this, information about mutual aid wildfires may be limited on the wildfire status

map. The status of a mutual aid wildfire is assigned by the lead agency. The lead agency is the best source of information.

Most wildfires are classified as out of control when they are first assessed, but can be quickly reclassified if initial attack efforts are successful. On larger-scale wildfires, or those burning in peat or similar ground conditions, it can be months or even years before the wildfire is considered extinguished.

However, even though wildfires may be considered “active” and therefore appear on the wildfire status map, there are varying degrees to which they will show activity or potential impact to a community.

Out of control



A wildfire may be classified as out of control when it is not responding to suppression efforts and is expected to grow.

An out of control wildfire may show signs of crown fire (flames burning along the tops of trees) and smoke, but not always. It is also possible for many parts of the wildfire to show low activity or little growth, but the wildfire may still be classified as out of control if it is not considered contained.

Being held



A wildfire is classified as being held once it is 100 per cent contained, meaning a perimeter has been established around the wildfire. The perimeter could be a fire guard, or combination of guard and natural barriers such as a body of water or rocky terrain. A being held wildfire is not expected to move beyond established boundaries under prevailing or forecast conditions.

A wildfire may also be considered being held if it is burning inside predetermined boundaries in an area where wildfire is identified as part of a landscape management plan. In this case, there would be no values threatened such as communities or infrastructure identified within the boundary.

A wildfire that is being held may still exhibit activity and smoke, but is considered contained. On some occasions, under extreme winds or unusual conditions, a being held wildfire may return to out of control. However generally, once a wildfire is being held, firefighters are able to reinforce containment lines and work on bringing the wildfire under control.

Under control



A wildfire is considered under control when it has been successfully managed to ensure no further spread. During this stage, firefighters may still be working to extinguish hot spots, or it may just be monitored for any activity.

Wildfires can remain under control for many months, and may emit smoke during this time. However, this does not indicate that the wildfire is in danger of growing.

Cold temperatures and snow are often the final stage to ensuring a wildfire is extinguished. Wildfire staff will evaluate an under control wildfire to determine if there are any remaining areas burning, or if it can be classified as extinguished. These fires will be scanned again in spring to ensure they are completely extinguished.

Turned over

A wildfire is given a status of turned over when responsibility for the extinguishment of the wildfire has been turned over to the responsible agency or individual.

Before the wildfire is turned over, Alberta Wildfire ensures the agency or individual is willing and able to completely extinguish the wildfire. The wildfire must be considered under control before it is turned over.

Information

The wildfire status map can be found here:

www.alberta.ca/wildfire-status

For more detailed information about wildfires within the Forest Protection Area, subscribe to receive an email update from your local forest area, available through the wildfire status page.