

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry Updated Protection Agreement

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Report Summary

This presentation by Jesse Oshell, Deputy Fire Chief, provides information regarding the updated Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry Protection Agreement.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

Fire Services has allocated \$175,000 in the 2021 Operating Budget for the wildland fire season agreement with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Background

The City of Greater Sudbury and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry maintain an agreement for the protection of Crown and Municipal land within the boundaries of the city. This agreement represents the largest Municipal Forest Fire Management agreement in the Province of Ontario covering 313,268 hectares of land. Each year the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and Greater Sudbury Fire Services respond to a combined 400 or more wildland fires inside the City limits. These fires are predicated on the previous winter precipitation, speed of annual thaw, and spring rainfall amounts. Greater Sudbury experiences both dry and wet summer seasons which may significantly impact the total wildland fires. Annually, Fire Services budgets \$175,000 for the wildland fire season agreement with the MNRF.

In 2017, Fire Services and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry each protected almost half of the municipality by sharing land area. This model put tremendous strain on Fire Services as it required significant resources, such as hose and pumps, along with manpower to access wildland fire locations which could often be located a kilometer or more off the travelled roadway. The dense brush and rocky terrain of a majority of the area did pose challenges to reaching the fire, locating adequate water supply, and having enough manpower for prolonged periods of time. Often, the services of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry were required at additional cost due to calling them into an area which was protected by Fire Services, this is considered an additional service above the agreement.

In 2021, Fire Services and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry updated the Municipal Forest Fire Management agreement and using historical fire response data and terrain mapping resources to best balance the Fire Service response with the MNRF response. Area and terrain which was only accessible by helicopter, for example, was assigned to the MNRF and local flat, road access areas were assigned to Fire Services. Using this approach and an achievable 500 feet off the travelled roadway as a guide, the agreement is an acceptable balance of resources and capability based on response for both services. This balance hopes to achieve financial stability for wildland response costs for the coming years.

The City of Greater Sudbury covers 3200 Kms² and Fire Services along with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry respond from the borders of Nairn Centre on the west to those on the east with Markstay-Warren. North to Cartier and south to Estaire-Wanup. All points in between are covered for wildland fire protection between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and Fire Services. Approximately 90% of all roadways and 500 feet from the travelled portion are covered by Fire Services, in addition to the industrial properties of Vale in the city core. The flatland areas of Chelmsford, Azilda, and Valley East are also protected by Fire Services. All islands, water accessible properties, and indigenous lands are protected by the MNRF, along with all areas beyond 500 feet from the roadway or as defined by the agreement map. Many rural properties are also protected from wildland fires by the MNRF.

As part of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry agreement, each year Fire Services provides training to our firefighters on the specific skills related to wildland firefighting. In addition to the core skills already in place with firefighters, a MNRF developed course is delivered, which prepares the firefighter to respond to rural and wildland scenarios where the ground conditions, type of material burning, weather patterns, and water supply all add complexity to the fire situation. Firefighters become proficient in the use of all the required tools, specialty pumps, hose, and the techniques to quickly and safely extinguish a wildland fire situation. In collaboration with our partners at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, material is delivered by MNRF staff, Fire Services Training Officers, and Station Captains. Training for these situations is a critical component of the annual wildland response.

Our collaboration with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry continues to protect our community, providing skills and resources where and when needed. Whether on training or response, both services are working together when there is a need for a wildland response.