



CANADA WILDFIRE STRATEGIC PLAN

2022-2027



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PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN



The strategic plan is an enduring document that sets the Canada Wildfire (CW) overall direction to support and guide short-term priorities and activities.

The philosophy of Canada Wildfire has remained consistent even as relative priorities have shifted. The 2021 review affirms the content with some clarification and reflects emerging knowledge and society.

The strategic direction of Canada Wildfire is represented in a logic model with specific measurable outcomes, allowing clear interpretation and reporting of results. The logic model also clarifies the distinct role of Canada Wildfire in the broader Canadian vegetation fire community.

CONTEXT

ORIGIN OF CANADA WILDFIRE

Canada Wildfire has operated since 2009 as part of a larger vegetation fire community that has encountered a remarkable string of challenging vegetation fire years while cultivating broad strategic planning. The Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy (CWFS) was endorsed by the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM) in 2006 and confirmed with minor changes in 2016. The Canadian Forest Service (CFS) convened a broad consultation process to develop The Canadian Blueprint for Wildland Fire Science (2019). In 2019, the federal government invested \$38.5 million through the emergency management plan for wildland (vegetation) fire science and operations in the Canadian Forest Service, including funding for the NSERC Canada Wildfire Strategic Research Network.

Canada Wildfire has been a key part of emerging research in vegetation fire through training scores of graduate students, delivering short courses and presentations to operational fire fighting teams, and contributing guidance to the overall Canadian research in vegetation fire. This culminated in leading the NSERC Canada Wildfire Strategic Research Network (2020 to 2025), based at the University of Alberta, under the direction of Mike Flannigan, PhD, that engages researchers and trainees in ten academic institutions.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is a fundamental driver of international scientific research as intense vegetation fire years, severe damage and widespread smoke are occurring with increasing regularity. Canada has already seen catastrophic vegetation fire seasons and events in the last decade, including:

- the highest three burned area years in British Columbia,
- a new record for area burned in Ontario,
- the largest single disruption both evacuation and financially with the Horse River Fire near Fort McMurray, Alberta,
- the sudden loss of the town of Lytton, British Columbia,
- and numerous difficult vegetation fire events with direct and indirect loss of life.

Consequently, historical approaches to vegetation fire management are less feasible year by year. Recognition of vegetation fires as an expanding threat amplifies the critical importance of solid scientific understanding, well-trained experts, and timely information transfer between researchers and practitioners.

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SOCIETAL DRIVERS

Societal awareness and understanding have changed significantly, as numerous international catastrophic vegetation fire events have placed images of fire, devastation, and even death in the news. The palls of smoke that reached across continents have raised direct awareness even in those thousands of kilometres away from the fires.

There is a growing awareness that vegetation fire is a natural part of the ecosystem, and the long-held mentality of fire as an enemy is weakening. There is a growing understanding that natural fire and cultural and other prescribed fire is key to restoring a more balanced regime. Vegetation fire research has consistently supported this with burning return periods, changing burn severity, and ecosystem resilience studies.

Vegetation fire has always had a substantial impact on a wide spectrum of society ranging from timber loss, disruption through evacuations, smoke exposure, and recreational loss. Frequently these impacts were managed by separate agencies or with limited cooperation. More recently, vegetation fire is consistently described as a “whole of society” issue and hence needs broad participation to tackle the challenges. This opens the door to broader attention to vegetation fire issues, and multi-disciplinary approaches are becoming normative in operational and academic domains.

It is increasingly clear that the world view of Indigenous peoples has been ignored or suppressed. Cultural burning that was practiced on this continent for millennia is increasingly being recognized for its direct value on managing fire impact and, perhaps more significantly, the importance of contextual knowledge for forest management. Engagement of traditional knowledge holders promises a more comprehensive understanding of vegetation fire.

PURPOSE OF CANADA WILDFIRE

Canada Wildfire was conceived to connect the operational vegetation fire communities with academia. This recognized that existing academic communities were not able to consistently address priority research concerns, develop a new generation of fire scientists, or ensure that academic discovery fed into operational processes. At the same time, operational communities could not address long-standing and emerging questions that would benefit from foundational research. There were (and are) examples around the world where intentional management of these challenges produced highly effective partnerships and tangible results. Canada Wildfire is becoming one of those examples.



BUSINESS PROCESSES

Canada Wildfire was initiated with an original Memorandum of Understanding in 2009 that continues to evolve in response to changing needs and membership. The essential structure relies on an executive committee for long-range vision and oversight with a management team for routine operations. There are ongoing processes to develop and maintain procedures to facilitate efficient operation while maintaining transparency.

STRATEGIC PLAN REFRESH

This strategic plan is an enduring document that sets the Canada Wildfire broad direction to support and guide short-term priorities and activities. Specifically, this plan builds on the maturity from the two preceding strategic plans and years of operational implementation.

At the outset of the 2021 review process, there was a consensus that the overall direction of the past plans remained broadly correct, with little need for a technical or subject matter review. The gradual expansion of members in Canada Wildfire, growing resources to conduct research, training, and knowledge exchange would benefit most from a focussed review on management processes.

The organizational philosophy (vision, mission, principles) was reviewed given changes in the political, social, and scientific environments. This re-examination confirmed the directions of the previous strategies used over the past 12 years with some minor language updates.

The two distinctions that emerged from the process are expected to be essential to future work plans. The first is that the strategic direction of Canada Wildfire is represented in a logic model with outcomes that support the development of specific indicators, allowing clear interpretation and reporting of results. The second is the development of the logic model clarified the distinct role of Canada Wildfire in the broader Canadian vegetation fire community and consequently identifies priority areas for focus.

PHILOSOPHY

VISION

Canada wildfire transforms vegetation fire management through partnerships between knowledge holders, practitioners, and policy-makers.

MISSION

The partnership drives innovation in vegetation fire management, policy, and practices through strategic investments in research and knowledge exchange while educating and mentoring generations of scientists and practitioners.

SCIENTIFIC RIGOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uphold the highest scientific standards
COLLABORATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable two-way exchange between research and practice Support the co-integration of research and practice
STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster vertical and horizontal alignment among partners Enable reciprocating connections between research and practice
ADAPTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously assess and respond to trends and changing contexts
INNOVATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage novel approaches to teaching, stakeholder input, outreach, communication, and collaboration Move beyond traditional vegetation fire science approaches to include new knowledge and changing contexts and encompass/embrace other disciplines
SHARED KNOWLEDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster a reciprocal exchange between research and knowledge application to ensure information is accessible, understandable, and ready to use Ensure science is useful to practice, and practice informs science
INCLUSIVENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honour Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and traditional knowledge Embrace diverse perspectives from western sciences, lived experiences, and traditional knowledge

STRATEGIC LOGIC MODEL

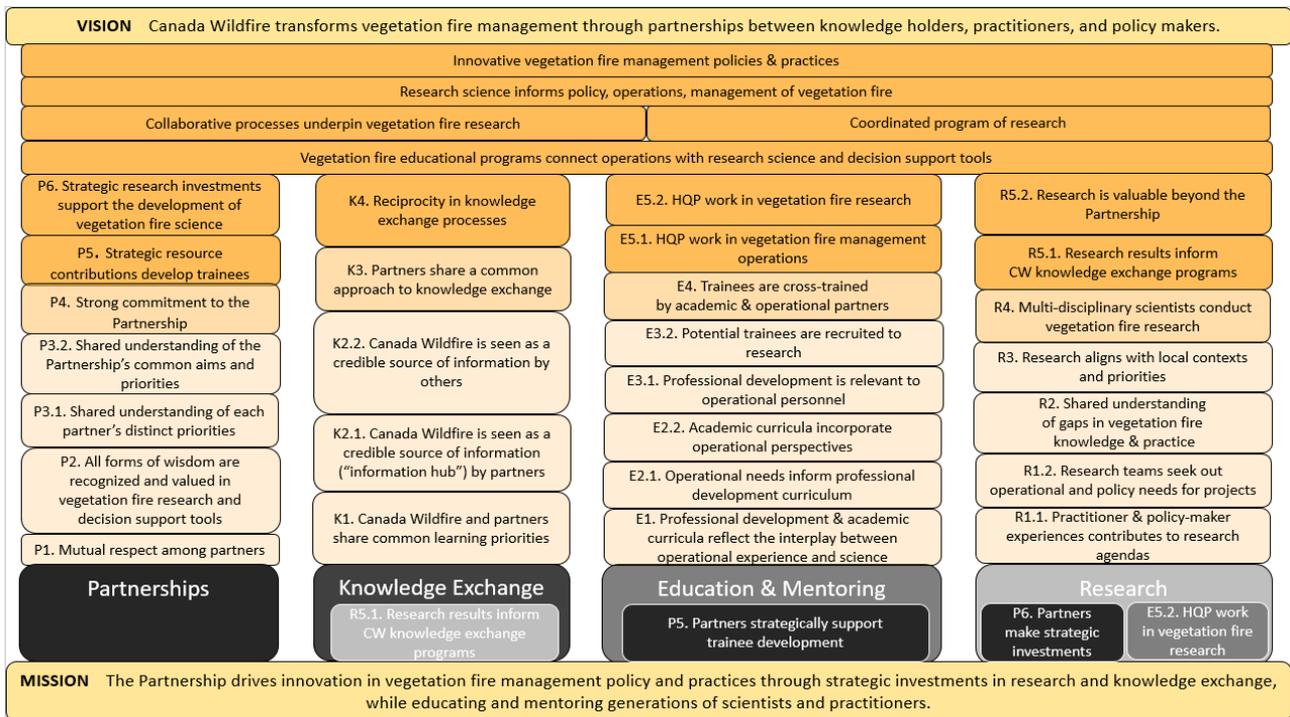
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CANADA WILDFIRE STRATEGIC LOGIC MODEL

This model portrays the logical sequence within the context of the vision and mission for Canada Wildfire to articulate its contribution to vegetation fire science and management and the broader outcomes of the vegetation fire community.



**Larger version available in Appendix III

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a formal stakeholder engagement plan to foster reciprocal communication in support of CW goals • Strategically engage multi-disciplinary and multi-sector stakeholders that will extend CW's reach • Build respectful relationships with Indigenous communities, educators, and partners • Develop and implement partnership guidelines [Terms of Reference] that align with core principles
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>P1 Mutual respect among partners P2 All forms of wisdom (Indigenous, practitioner, and research) are recognized and valued in vegetation fire research and decision support tools P3 Shared understanding of each partner's distinct priorities P4 Shared understanding of the Partnership's common aims and priorities</p>
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>P5 Strong commitment to the Partnership</p>
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>P6 Strategic resource contributions develop trainees P7 Strategic research investments support the development of vegetation fire science</p>

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement mechanisms to foster mutual exchange of knowledge amongst partners: academic, operational, and Indigenous knowledge holders. • Develop and implement a formal communications plan that encompasses multiple knowledge exchange platforms, including plain language information where appropriate • Establish common learning priorities among stakeholders to guide Knowledge Exchange programming • Develop and disseminate tools in multiple knowledge exchange formats
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>K1 Canada Wildfire and partners share common learning priorities K2 Canada Wildfire is seen as a credible source of information ("information hub") by partners K3 Canada Wildfire is seen as a credible source of information by others</p>
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>K4 Partners share a common approach to knowledge exchange</p>
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>K5 Reciprocity in knowledge exchange processes</p>

EDUCATION AND MENTORING

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboratively develop professional development curricula with partners • Coordinate and align professional development opportunities across partnerships • Foster internships/ secondments between partners as mentoring opportunities (formal or short term) • Maintain inventory of educational opportunities offered by partners • Include Indigenous perspectives in educational opportunities
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>E1 Professional development & academic curricula reflect the interplay between operational experience and science</p> <p>E2 Operational needs inform professional development curriculum</p> <p>E3 Academic curricula incorporate operational perspectives</p> <p>E4 Professional development is relevant to operational personnel</p> <p>E5 Potential trainees are recruited to vegetation fire research</p>
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	E6 Trainees are cross-trained by academic & operational partners
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>E7 HQP work in vegetation fire management operations</p> <p>E8 HQP work in vegetation fire research</p>

RESEARCH

STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage diverse practitioners and policy-makers in setting research agendas • Incorporate practitioner and Indigenous knowledge holders in research committee structures • Maintain a repository of CW research • Develop and implement a formal plan for obtaining continued grant funding to support research priorities • Manage the administration of CW research projects • Actively engage Indigenous perspectives in research
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>R1 Practitioner & policy-maker experience contributes to research agendas</p> <p>R2 Research teams seek out operational and policy needs for projects</p> <p>R3 Shared understanding of gaps in vegetation fire knowledge & practice</p> <p>R4 Research aligns with local contexts and priorities</p>
MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	R5 Multi-disciplinary scientists conduct vegetation fire research
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	<p>R6 Research results inform CW knowledge exchange programs</p> <p>R7 Research is valuable beyond the Partnership</p>

BROADER CONTEXT

Canada Wildfire is part of a larger community of organizations with mandates directly and indirectly linked to vegetation fire. Articulating the unique role of Canada Wildfire in the larger context is helpful to minimize duplication, make certain the role is fully met, and ensure linkages exist at points of intersection.

The table below draws on existing documents such as the Canada Wildland Fire Strategy (CWFS) and The Blueprint for Wildland Fire Science while recognizing the evolving complexities of vegetation fire will make this an ongoing conversation.

Canada Wildfire work contributes to pathways that support societal & transformative change	Other organizations manage this work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada Wildfire transforms vegetation fire management through partnerships between knowledge holders, practitioners, and policy makers. • The partnership drives innovation in vegetation fire management policy and practices through strategic investments in research and knowledge exchange, while educating and mentoring generations of scientists and practitioners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence informed vegetation fire risk information is available to Canadians. • Lives & livelihoods are protected from negative impacts of vegetation fire. • Vegetation fire mitigation information is widely available (smoke, property, etc.) • Landscape management practices support multiple uses (cultural, recreation, commercial).
<h2>SHARED GOALS</h2>	
<p>Canadians are resilient and live with vegetation fire.</p> <p>Resilient forest ecosystem</p>	

APPLICATION OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

WORK PLANNING

This strategic plan and the logic model should be used to drive the routine work prioritization and planning process in the context of evaluating progress. The overall direction of the Partnership laid out in this plan will ensure it is well positioned to address the support required by funding partners for specific projects.

WORK PROGRESS EVALUATION

The framework of outcomes establishes a systematic approach to evaluating progress toward overarching goals. This then becomes a baseline to demonstrate ongoing progress over subsequent years and help set work priorities.

ROUTINE REVIEWS

A periodic review of this strategic plan is vital to confirm that it is responsive to a changing environment while having enough consistency to allow for longer-term planning. This plan should be reviewed in the autumn of 2027.

APPENDIX I: GLOSSARY

Knowledge Holders	In the broadest possible sense includes any person or body with experiential, historical, cultural, or experimental expertise on vegetation fire.
Logic Model	Description of business process that outlines each essential step moving from inputs to activities to outputs to outcomes. In a strategic model, the focus is on changes to contextual thinking or changes to outcomes.
Mission	A concise summary of the purpose and the intentions an organization pursues to realize the vision.
Organizational Philosophy	A set of principles, beliefs and preferences that govern how an organization operates both internally and with clients or partners. This includes priorities, values, and style. Usually encompasses vision, mission, values or principles, and strategic priorities.
Policy-makers	Primarily referring to those developing vegetation fire policy but includes any discipline that intersects with vegetation fire like emergency management, health, land use planning etc.
Practitioners	Primarily referring to operational personnel in operational vegetation fire management ranging from frontline firefighters to leadership. Could also include other forestry operational disciplines.
Values	The core principles that guide and focus an organization on its culture and activities.
Vegetation Fire	Combustion of plants or plant debris in a natural setting consuming natural fuels and is often referred to as wildland fire or wildfire. The term is primarily used for uncontrolled fire in this document but may include prescribed or intentional fire.
Vision	Aspirational description of future ideal state that the organization wishes to achieve.

APPENDIX II: OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

To be completed and updated routinely to support annual and long-term planning.

PARTNERSHIP

Outcomes	Indicator/Metric	Evaluation Method
P1 Mutual respect among partners		
P2 All forms of wisdom are recognized		
P3 Shared understanding of each partner's distinct priorities		
P4 Shared understanding of the goals		
P5 Strong commitment to the Partnership		
P6 Strategic investments develop trainees		
P7 Strategic investments support vegetation fire science		

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Outcome	Indicator/ Metric	Evaluation Method
K1 Common learning priorities		
K2 CW becomes information source for partners		
K3 CW is a credible information source externally		
K4 Partners share a common approach to KE		

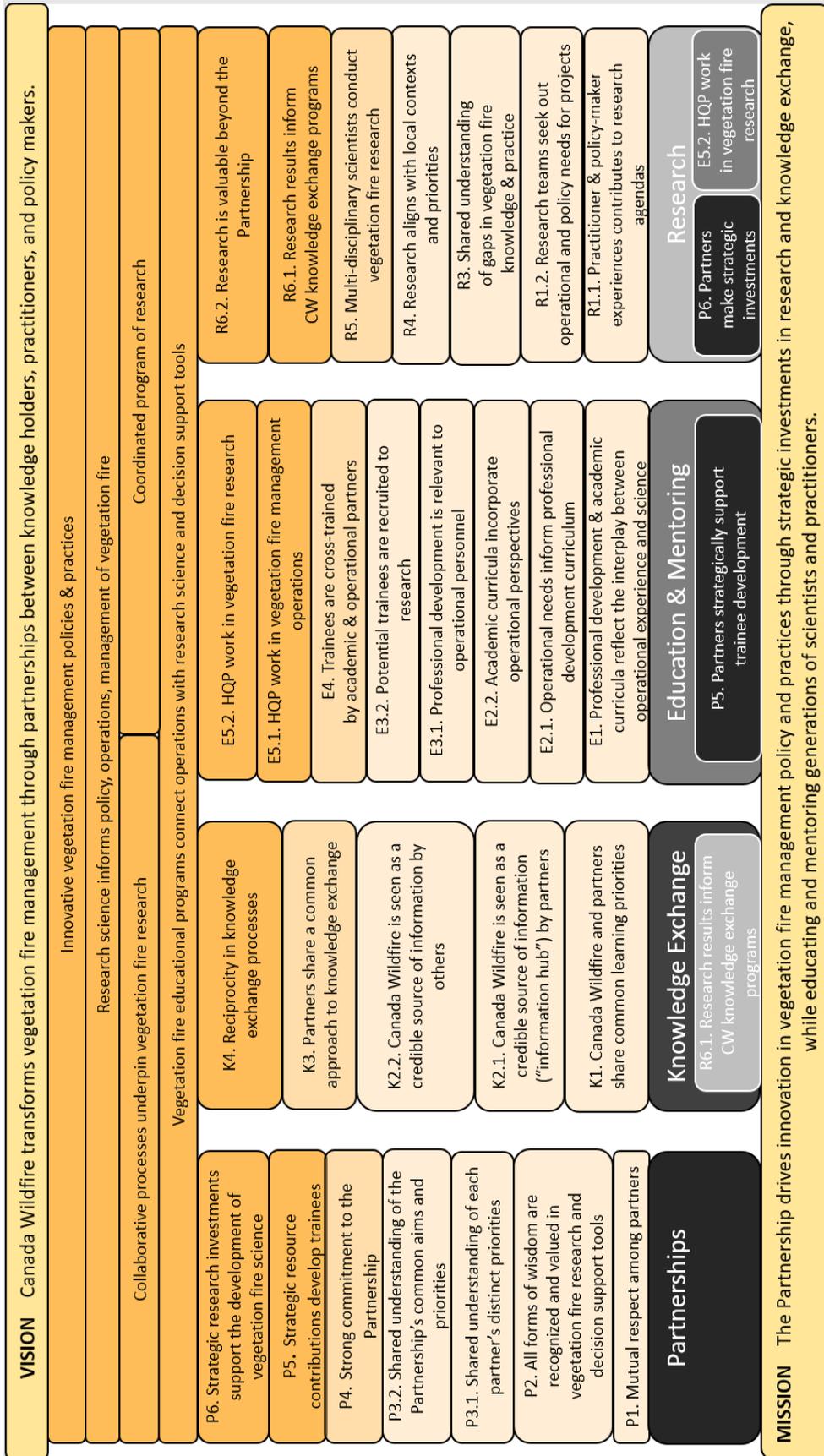
EDUCATION AND MENTORING

Outcomes	Indicator/Metric	Evaluation Method
E1 Professional development and academic curricula reflect experience and research		
E2 Professional development driven by operational needs		
E3 Academic curricula incorporate an operational perspective		
E4 Professional development is relevant to operational personnel.		
E5 Trainees are recruited to vegetation fire research		
E6 Trainees are cross-trained by academic and operational partners		
E7 HQP work in operations		
E8 HQP work in research		

RESEARCH

Outcomes	Indicator/Metric	Evaluation Method
R1 Research agenda guided by practitioners and policy-makers		
R2 Research teams seek operational and policy input		
R3 Shared understanding of gaps		
R4 Research aligns locally		
R5 Research engages multi-disciplinary teams		
R6 KE programs informed by research		
R7 Research is valuable beyond Partnership		

APPENDIX III: LOGIC MODEL



APPENDIX IV: MEMBERS AS OF 2022

EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

- University of Alberta School of Forest Science and Management
- Thompson Rivers University
- Canadian Forest Service (Natural Resources Canada)
- Alberta Agriculture Forestry and Rural Economic Development
- British Columbia Wildfire Service; Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS

- Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency
- Parks Canada
- Government of the Northwest Territories, Forest Management Division

APPENDIX V: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

These documents support the directions mandated in the strategic plan.

They may be updated as required to reflect changes in the work of Canada Wildfire while maintaining the directions outlined in the strategic plan.

- Memorandum of understanding and membership articles
- CW Organizational Structure
- Executive Board Terms of Reference
- Management Team Terms of Reference
- Membership Terms of Reference
- Science Advisory Committee and Project Priorities Terms of Reference
- Research Priorities
- CW staff handbook