
REPORT OF THE
**Expert Advisory
Council *to the*
Minister of
Environment and
Climate Change**

Recommendations on wildfire
awareness and education,
prevention and preparedness,
and air quality
March 2026

Table of Contents

1. Land Acknowledgement	4
2. Introduction	5
3. Background	6
4. Recommendations for the 2026 Wildfire Season	7
5. Mid to Long-Term Recommendations (1-5 years)	12
6. Appendices	13
A. Stakeholders Engaged	13
B. Discussion Questions.....	14
C. Biographies of Council Members.....	15

1. Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Manitoba is on the treaty territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Nehethowuk Woodland Cree and Inninewuk Swampy Cree peoples.

We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis, that northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

We respect the spirit and intent of Treaties and Treaty Making and remain committed to working in partnership with Ininew, Anishinaabe, Anishinew, Dakota, Dene, Inuit, and Red River Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation and collaboration.

We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of Manitoba as the original stewards of these lands and environment, the knowledge they have developed over millennia of living in harmony with nature.

2. Introduction

The 2025 Throne Speech tasked the Expert Advisory Council (EAC) with conducting a review with recommendations on wildfire awareness and education, prevention and preparedness, and air quality. Engagement sessions were held in person and virtually on Thursday January 22, 2026, followed by two virtual sessions on Wednesday February 11 and Thursday February 12. A list of participants for the engagement sessions can be found in Appendix A.

The engagement session focused on three topic areas: 1) Wildfire Awareness and Education; 2) Wildfire Prevention and Preparedness; and 3) Air Quality. Participants were provided with a list of questions (Appendix B) prior to the meeting to help frame but not limit the discussion. A total of 40 organisations attended the engagement sessions. Participants were encouraged to bring forward additional information, insights, experiences, or recommendations they felt would support the EAC's review and advice to the Minister. Key priorities included, protecting people, property, the environment and the economy. The EAC decided to provide recommendations that can be initiated immediately to help prepare for the 2026 wildfire season and long-term recommendations that can be implemented over the coming years.

Recommendations were grouped into five themes:

1. **Actively promote the FireSmart Program**
2. **Empower communities to act in wildfire prevention and preparedness**
3. **Increase effectiveness of evacuation**
4. **Improve access to clean air**
5. **Improve communications**

3. Background

During 2025, Manitoba experienced its worst wildfire season in 30 years. The wildfires forced approximately 32,000 people to evacuate their homes over the spring and summer—some communities more than once. These events disrupt local businesses, damage ecosystems, impact health and well-being, and can generate significant greenhouse gas emissions. We are aware that the frequency and intensity of wildfires is increasing with climate change and their impacts will continue to have stress on Manitobans. Increasing emissions will result in rising temperatures and drier conditions which will lead to increased wildfires which in turn will lead to more emissions. In order to break this cycle, Manitoba needs to be a leader in emissions reduction and wildfire prevention.

Manitoba's Path to Net Zero outlines Manitoba's plan to achieve a balance of emissions through reduction and carbon sequestration by 2050. This plan is a bold strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen communities and build a resilient, low-carbon economy that benefits all Manitobans. That said, Manitoba will continue to face recurring wildfires highlighting the importance of preparedness and building resilience. Even when wildfire activity within Manitoba is limited, there is often the threat of wildfire smoke from other provinces that affects our health. In addition, when Manitoba's firefighters and wildfire resources are called upon to support other jurisdictions, it is essential that responders are adequately trained and ready to respond to wildfires.

4. Recommendations for the 2026 Wildfire Season

1. Actively promote the FireSmart Program

FireSmart is a national program that helps Canadian neighbourhoods increase resilience to wildfire and reduce risk of wildfire damage. There are several resources under the FireSmart program that exist, but they are not reaching Manitobans as broadly as needed. Currently, FireSmart messaging is included in Fire Bulletins and other wildfire communications. More targeted delivery through workshops and webinars could highlight the importance of FireSmart. A FireSmart Committee would be instrumental in amplifying the program, guiding the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and placing an environmental social and economic lens on all FireSmart initiatives. It is important that biodiversity is maintained, and that sustainable forestry practices are followed. For example, if one tree is cut down, two trees must be planted.

- 1.1 Establish a FireSmart Committee composed of government, Elders and external agencies.
- 1.2 Deliver informative workshops and factsheets tailored to communities.
- 1.3 Establish a funding mechanism to support FireSmart initiatives which would include staff to coordinate the program.
- 1.4 Encourage the Federal Government to be more active in supporting the national coordination of wildfire resources and training of firefighters (Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre - CIFFC) and to increase support for FireSmart initiatives.

2. Empower communities to act in wildfire prevention and preparedness.

Communities know best what is needed to support their people, their infrastructure and their way of life. There are many benefits to training local leaders and Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to prepare and protect their communities. This includes hiring and training local Initial Attack (IA) crews or increasing support services during time of evacuation. Not only will wildfire preparedness protect people and their property, but it will also reduce costs in the long run and generate economic opportunities.

Service organisations also face challenges assisting evacuees. For example, organisations did not have the resources they needed to prepare for and to accommodate the influx of people during the 2025 wildfire season.

- 2.1 Improve support for firefighters including incentives, mental health, training and recruitment strategies.
- 2.2 Increased support for front-line staff of Manitoba Wildfire Service, such as Emergency Fire Fighters, Fire Rangers and the Initial Attack (IA) or TAC (Tactical) Crews.
- 2.3 Collaborate with First Nations to develop back-up power sources to improve community climate resilience, such as solar and battery storage.
- 2.4 Expand our understanding and application of cultural burning principles in Manitoba.
- 2.5 Support service organisations and businesses to assist in their on-going service delivery to the community when evacuated.
- 2.6 Develop a network of service organisations to be more efficient during a wildfire event.

3. Increase effectiveness of evacuation

It is crucial that people know how to prepare and protect themselves from wildfires and other climate hazards requiring evacuation. Manitoba Wildfire Program and Emergency Management Organisation (EMO) have good resources for evacuees, but government needs to amplify how this information is getting out to the public. Physical and emotional preparation is necessary prior to evacuation. EMO has a “Go Bag” checklist for those preparing to leave their community, however it also important to consider emotional preparedness. Alongside these practical steps, it is important to recognise that wildfire and smoke events can cause trauma and distress. Offering education and concrete actions can help reduce climate anxiety and give people a sense of agency.

- 3.1 Encourage homeowners to develop an evacuation plan prior to events.
- 3.2 Develop a checklist of what to do in your house before you evacuate and what to take with you.
- 3.3 Provide early warning notices and provincial forecasts to help people prepare in case evacuation is needed (similar to flood and drought forecasts).
- 3.4 Work with educators to equip schools with short, practical wildfire toolkits to better prepare the youth and address climate anxiety.
- 3.5 Keep communities and families together during evacuation. Separating people from their community, culture, friends and family contributes to increased anxiety and requires additional organization services.
- 3.6 Encourage Business Continuity Planning for local economic enterprises as they are being displaced.
- 3.7 Provide mental health supports for evacuees dealing with trauma during evacuation.

4. Improve access to clean air

Wildfire smoke can lead to poor air quality both outdoors and indoors. Severe smoke exposure can lead to health impacts, including heart and lung problems, especially for vulnerable groups and people with underlying conditions. The Air Quality Index (AQI) used to inform health effects from wildfire smoke focuses on mortality and hospital visits making it difficult to answer specific questions about AQI values on individual health. Childcare programs and youth sports lack clarity on AQI thresholds for outdoor activities. More research is needed to understand the short and long-term health effects of smoke on people. Ultimately, by providing people with information on risks and concrete actions to stay safe and healthy, they can make informed decisions.

- 4.1 Assist evacuees, firefighters, outdoor workers and those with pre-existing conditions from exposure to smoke during the wildfire season. (For example, policies, limiting exposure time, equipment and personal protective equipment).
- 4.2 Establish an air quality education program, with staff, that coordinates information for households, community groups, schools and workplaces with best practices (i.e. HEPA filters, air purifiers and N95 masks).
- 4.3 Support outreach to elevate the awareness of the impacts of wildfire smoke on outdoor activities and indoor air quality.
- 4.4 Make the Air Quality Index numbers more relatable to lifestyle activities.
- 4.5 Identify public buildings that are Clean Air Spaces during wildfire events.
- 4.6 Engage Manitobans to understand what needs to be included in the development of a Clean Air Strategy.

5. Improve Communications

A comprehensive communication plan needs to include clear, concise and consistent messaging before, during and after wildfires. Serious consideration needs to be given to different communications platforms, frequency of communication and importance of a trusted messenger. Partnering with trusted organisations who can distill and relay information appropriately to their communities is recommended. Another effective communication tool is to draw comparisons, for example, comparing air quality to smoking can help translate abstract risks into clear, tangible health impacts.

Transparency about sharing resources and firefighters through mutual-aid agreements is needed so people understand that helping another community does not mean that their community is left at risk. The mutual aid strategy would alleviate concerns about damage to their community's equipment.

There is also a need for specific information to support the safety of evacuees in Winnipeg, especially in the context of heightened risk of exploitation and the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-spirited People (MMIWG2S+). In addition, the return home information and planning for evacuees (especially youth) is just as important as the evacuation information and planning.

- 5.1 Create a centralized communication board/system for evacuees with frequent updates.
- 5.2 Engage Re.Climate to provide advice on how best to communicate the relationship between a changing climate and increases in wildfire, heatwaves and poor air quality.
- 5.3 Maximize the use of plain language, infographics and story telling to convey messages to the public.
- 5.4 Develop short "MPI-style 60 second" message or radio public service announcements to inform the public about wildfire evacuation strategies and safety tips.
- 5.5 Develop a local hero's educational campaign where the public can submit success stories.
- 5.6 Partner with organisations like the Lung Association to support air quality health risk communication.
- 5.7 Prepare information for evacuees to understand the challenges of large cities as well as a plan for their return home.
- 5.8 Establish transparency of mutual-aid agreements outlining how firefighters and resources are shared, eliminating concerns about being left vulnerable when local firefighters and equipment are reassigned.

5. Mid- to Long-Term Recommendations (1-5 years)

The following list of long-term recommendations builds on the short-term recommendations above and can be implemented over the coming years. These recommendations will help strengthen Manitoba's capacity to address the impacts of wildfires and will support Manitobans before, during and after the wildfire season.

1. Expanding on recommendation #2.8 – Identify mental health services to support firefighters, evacuees, and schools navigating climate anxiety.
 - Identify skills that can be taught prior to events to help people cope with mental health strain.
2. Develop a strategy for disaster waste management that includes the following:
 - Disposal of white goods (refrigerators, freezers, etc.)
 - Disposal of construction and demolition materials
 - Disposal of regulated materials (asbestos, hazardous waste, etc.)
 - Information on how to leave your home in order to protect your belongings, to avoid food spoilage, and to avoid damage to your electronics and appliances.
3. Expanding on recommendation #2.6 – Ease transition for evacuees from home to evacuation centres.
 - Organise community placements and events.
 - Provide spaces for evacuees to have traditional foods and cultural events.
 - Create a program of activities for children that will keep families healthy and active together.
4. Develop a Clean Air Strategy that includes the following:
 - Raise awareness of the impacts of wildfire smoke on outdoor activities and home and building indoor air quality.
 - Evaluate air monitoring system and the ability to produce real-time data.
 - Identify research on the health effects of varying levels of smoke exposure.
5. Establish guidelines for air filtration systems.
 - Regulate a standard for new builds and major retrofits
 - Require public and private buildings receiving public grants for HVAC to incorporate filtration.
 - Make information available for the public to understand air filtration standards.
6. Provide leadership by retrofitting existing provincial public buildings to be clean air spaces and areas to shelter in place.
 - Incorporate into the development of a Low Carbon Government Strategy
7. Develop a Youth Climate Corps to help young Manitobans work in green jobs.
 - Hire youth to engage in preventative work as it will reduce costs in the long run and generates economic opportunities.
8. Conduct a jurisdictional scan of what other provinces are doing well in terms of wildfire awareness and education, prevention and preparedness, and air quality.

6. Appendices

Appendix A – Stakeholders Engaged

The Council met with the following organizations/individuals and thank them for their time and effort:

1. Assuah, Anderson – University College of the North
2. Bullock, Dr. Ryan – University of Winnipeg
3. Cameron, Emilia – Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR)
4. Chan, Dr. Ming-Ka – Physicians for the Environment
5. Constant, Tammy – Giigewigamig First Nation Health Authority
6. Davidson-Hunt, Iain – University of Manitoba
7. Finley, Michelle – Wawanesa
8. Halayko, Andrew – University of Manitoba
9. Kehl, Jodie – Manitoba Childcare Association
10. Kovacs, Paul – Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR)
11. Maillet, Dr. Jay – University of Winnipeg
12. Mahmood, Jamil – Mainstreet Project
13. Martin, Lynn – Manitoba Childcare Association
14. McGillvray, Glenn – Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR)
15. Moerkerk, Sheri – Insurance Brokers of Manitoba (IBAM)
16. Mookherjee, Neeloffer – University of Manitoba
17. Munro, Robert – Manitoba Emergency Management Organization (EMO)
18. Pascoe, Dr. Christopher – University of Manitoba
19. Pierlot, Paul – Conservation and Wildfire Services Division
20. Popowich, Doug – Northern Association of Community Councils
21. Saarinen, Kayla – Manitoba Public Health
22. Saberian, Soodeh – University of Manitoba
23. Schenk, Ryan – Office of the Fire Commissioner
24. Senyk, Jason – Manitoba Emergency Management Organization (EMO)
25. Singleton, David – Manitoba Federation of Labour
26. Smith, Jasmine – Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
27. Thompson, Shirley – Natural Resources Institute
28. Tordiffe, Kevin – Manitoba Public Health
29. Valentino, Kathy – Association of Manitoba Municipalities
30. Yasui, Etsuko – Brandon University
31. Zdrill, Leonard – Manitoba School Board Association

Appendix B – Discussion Questions

The Council provided the following discussion questions to stakeholders ahead of each engagement session. Participants were also encouraged to bring forward additional information, insight, experiences, or recommendations they felt would support the EAC's work.

1. Wildfire Awareness and Education

With respect to supporting individuals and communities' knowledge about wildfire:

- What do people need to know about wildfires, including those not directly involved?
- With respect to information about wildfires that is available publicly:
 - Is the information useful?
 - Are there gaps with communication?
 - Is additional information needed?
- Do you have any specific ideas on collaboration with Indigenous communities on communication of Indigenous knowledge related to wildfire prevention and preparedness?

2. Prevention and Preparedness

With respect to supporting individuals and communities taking action to minimize the risk of wildfire, protect property and be able to respond appropriately in a wildfire emergency:

- Are there opportunities to improve communications related to wildfire prevention and preparedness?
 - What information is needed to help people be better prepared for wildfires in a changing climate?
 - What information do you feel was missing or insufficient during past wildfire events?
 - Are there opportunities to improve the adoption of fire management principles and programs like FireSmart through better, additional, or different communication?

3. Air Quality

With respect to supporting individuals and communities being better prepared for poor air quality resulting from wildfires:

- What information does the public and communities need?
- How can monitored air quality be most effectively communicated to the public?
- How can people be better informed about actions to protect themselves and their families during poor air quality events?

Appendix C – Biographies of Council Members

Brigette DePape, Chair

Brigette DePape (Winnipeg) is a Project Manager - Climate Planner with Narratives and was the Manager of Grants and Contributions with Indigenous Clean Energy. She was a Social Innovation Fellow with Carleton University, a Grants Specialist and Youth Engagement Coordinator with The Winnipeg Foundation, and the Prairies Regional Organizer and Youth Vote Campaigner with The Council of Canadians. Previously, Ms. DePape served as a Board Director with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. She has a Master's in Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership from Carleton University, a Bachelor of Social Sciences from the University of Ottawa, and graduate certificates in the Science and Policy of Climate Change and in Organizing, Leadership and Social Change.

Armand Bélanger

Armand Bélanger (Gimli) is the Manager at the East Interlake Watershed District. He serves as Director of the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium. Mr. Bélanger also served as a 4-H Leader, as well as Director at the Lake Winnipeg Foundation. He pursued studies at Royal Roads University and the University of Winnipeg. Mr. Bélanger has a Diploma in Natural Resources Management Technology from the University College of the North.

Patrick Campbell

Patrick Campbell (Winnipeg) is a Senior Principal Environmental Scientist and the Market Leader at WSP Canada. He serves as Chair of the Manitoba Environmental Industries Association Board and as a Member of Manitoba Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Campbell has served on various boards, including as President of the American Industrial Hygiene Association (Manitoba Chapter) and as a Member of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineers. He has a Bachelor of Science (Environmental Studies) from the University of Manitoba and is certified as both a Canadian Certified Environmental Practitioner and a Canadian Registered Safety Professional.

Daryl Domitruk

Daryl Domitruk, PhD (Darlingford) is the Executive Director of Manitoba Pulse and Soybean Growers. He serves as a Director of the Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiatives and as an advisor to Agrologists Manitoba. Mr. Domitruk has a Doctor of Philosophy in Crop Science from the University of Saskatchewan, a Master of Science and a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the University of Manitoba.

Derek Earl

Derek Earl (Grande Pointe) is the Founder and Chair of the Board of BizforClimate. Until recently, he was the Manager for Global Infrastructure Advisory at KPMG Canada. Mr. Earl serves on the Stakeholder Reference Group for the Taskforce on Net Zero Policy. He was Vice Chair for SEED Winnipeg and an Executive Mentor to Master of Business Administration students at the Asper School of Business. Mr. Earl has a Master of Arts (Political Science) from the University of Ottawa, Bachelor of Arts (Political Studies) and a Certificate for Environmental, Social, Governance Sustainability Essentials from the New York University Stern School of Business and the Cambridge School of Business.

Heather Eckton

Heather Eckton (Winnipeg) is a Consultant with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. She has served as the Climate Action Divisional Teacher Team Leader in Seven Oaks School Division, as well as a Sessional Instructor in the Faculty of Education at both the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. She serves as Committee Member for the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network of Manitoba, and an Executive Committee Member for Educators for Climate Action Manitoba. Ms. Eckton is currently pursuing a Doctorate at the University of Manitoba. She has a Master of Education, Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Science from the University of Manitoba.

Kyley Parker

Kyley Parker (Cartier) is an Organizer and Business Agent of LiUNA Local 1258. Previously, he served as Lead Hand/Blaster at BBE Hydro Constructors. Mr. Parker co-founded the LiUNA Membership Engagement Group. He has completed Primary Leadership Qualifications (1-5) and has a certificate in Workplace Safety Management from the Canadian Forces.

Dimple Roy

Dimple Roy (Winnipeg) is the Director of Water Management at the International Institute for Sustainable Development and a former Policy Analyst with Manitoba Conservation. She is a Member on the Red River Watershed Board of the International Joint Commission, Co-Chair of the Climate West Advisory Committee and sits on the Luxton Residents' Association Volunteer Board. Ms. Roy was also a Member of the Round Table for Sustainable Development, Lake Friendly Alliance and the Mount Carmel Clinic Board of Directors. Ms. Roy has a Master of Environmental Design from the University of Calgary.

Laurie Streich

Laurie Streich (Winnipeg) retired, has more than 30 years experience with the Government of Manitoba, having served as director of environmental programs and strategies, the director of pollution prevention and manager of the state of environment reporting program. Ms. Streich is a graduate of the communication and media studies program through Red River College and has been a commissioner for the Clean Environment Commission since 2017. She has served on the Expert Advisory Council since 2018.

Kathleen Tiede

Kathleen Tiede (East St Paul) is an Associate and Project Manager at Crosier Kilgour. She has worked on LEED, Green Globes, and Net Zero Carbon projects. Ms. Tiede serves on the Embodied Carbon Technical Advisory Committee and LEED Accelerator Committee for the Canada Green Building Council. She has a Bachelor of Science (Biosystems Engineering) from the University of Manitoba and is a Certified RETScreen Professional. Ms. Tiede has obtained Micro Credentials in Whole Life Cycle Assessment from the British Columbia Institute of Technology and a Micro Credential in Zero Carbon Emissions.