



2026 Report V1: Robust Analysis and Wildfire Resource Plans Needed

Determining the optimal mix of personnel, aircraft, and contracted equipment needed to fight wildfires will help the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency respond effectively and manage costs

REGINA—June 23, 2026: In her **2026 Report – Volume 1**, Chapter 5, Provincial Auditor Tara Clemett audited the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency’s resource planning processes for wildfire response making **11 recommendations**.

Wildfires can devastate communities—destroying homes, disrupting infrastructure and supply routes, and causing long-term economic losses across sectors like forestry, tourism, and mining. Effective response requires having the right personnel, equipment, and supplies available in the right place at the right time.

The Agency relies on key resources such as firefighters and aircraft but has not determined optimal requirements ahead of each wildfire season, increasing costs and reliance on contracted resources. In 2025, it spent approximately \$26.3 million (2024: \$1.9 million) on contracted resources obtained through mutual aid agreements. We found **the Agency needs to analyze the effectiveness of its wildfire resource use, including timeliness and cost-benefit of contracted resources**. The Agency neither assesses costs nor consistently tracks when contracted resources are requested and received—we found it took an average of 15 days for contracted personnel (e.g., firefighters) to arrive and deploy to fires in 2025.

“By evaluating costs, systematically tracking requested and received contracted resources, and basing budgets on robust resource plans, the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency can make sure it has the necessary resources to manage and mitigate the risks associated with wildfires and improve cost efficiency,” said Tara Clemett.

We found the Agency also needs to:

- **Develop robust resource plans (i.e., optimal resources, staff recruitment and retention, capital asset renewal and replacement) for wildfire response.** For example, by strategically managing capital assets like aircraft and IT systems, the Agency can minimize downtime, reduce maintenance costs, and extend its assets’ use/service life.
- **Prepare its annual budget based on resource plans and include all expected wildfire response costs.** Actual variable costs related to wildfire response exceeded the Agency’s initial budget by more than \$70 million a year since 2023, showing budgets do not reasonably reflect expected costs of wildfire response each year.
- **Set and monitor an initial-attack success measure showing the extent of wildfires kept below 10 hectares in size, a key indicator of effective wildfire suppression.** In 2025, the Agency had an initial-attack success rate of 70% compared to 76% in 2024.
- **Work with communities identified as having higher wildfire risk to make sure community wildfire preparedness plans exist.** We found the Agency identified 89 northern communities in areas at higher risk of wildfires and 21 of those communities have not completed a wildfire preparedness plan.

- During the 2025 wildfire season, 510 wildfires burned 3 million hectares and cost the Agency over \$350 million for wildfire response.
- In 2025, short-term helicopter contracts averaged \$3,400/hour—costing about 35% higher than the eight long-term contracts—suggesting the Agency could have saved around \$500,000 by using an additional long-term helicopter contract.
- 37 aircraft maintenance engineers required, with 31 positions filled in 2025.
- Two air tankers grounded in November 2024 due to major deficiencies and unavailable for the 2025 season (with return expected by July 2026). One additional air tanker unavailable for the start of 2026 season—maintenance delay affected by aircraft maintenance engineer vacancies.
- In 2025, additional 916 wildfire personnel and 12 aircraft contracted through mutual aid agreements (2024: 112 personnel; 3 aircraft). Contracted personnel cost two to five times more than Agency firefighters in 2025.

The Agency also needs to work with the Ministry of Finance to revisit the funding model for wildfire operations, monitor and report to its Board on the implementation of recommendations from formal wildfire season reviews, and centrally track firefighter training completion.

The full Provincial Auditor’s **2026 Report – Volume 1** available online at auditor.sk.ca.

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