

Assessment of Implementation Report

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

Wildfire Management: Processes for Prevention and Review and Improvement

(November 2018)

Summary of Recommendations

In April 2021, we completed our assessment of implementation from our November 2018 audit of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry's *Wildfire Management: Processes for Prevention and Review and Improvement*. We found that both recommendations have been implemented:

IMPLEMENTED Recommendation:

Ensure processes are in place to evaluate and report on wildfire prevention programs

IMPLEMENTED Recommendation:

Comply with business rules for internal reviews results reporting and establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations from external reviews

Introduction

In 2018, we audited whether:

- the prevention and review and improvement components of the department's wildfire management program were well designed and working effectively
- the department had processes to evaluate, implement and report on recommendations and opportunities for improvement from external public reviews

We found in 2018 that while the department had effective systems and processes for the planning and delivery of its wildfire prevention and review and improvement activities, it was not completing the necessary monitoring, analysis and reporting for certain programs and public reviews to allow the department to evaluate and determine if it was achieving desired results and progress.

We made two recommendations to the department.⁵¹

Ensure processes are in place to evaluate and report on wildfire prevention programs:

- a) publicly report on its FireSmart programs, including how this work helps reduce wildfire hazard and risk
- b) ensure there are processes in place to measure, monitor and report on the results and effectiveness of the various activities set out in the forest areas' annual wildfire prevention plans

Comply with business rules for internal reviews results reporting and establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations from external reviews:

- a) comply with its established business rules for internal results reporting for the review and improvement program
- b) establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations and opportunities for improvement from independent external reviews and publicly report implementation progress against these

In our assessment of implementation, completed in April 2021, we found the department has implemented both recommendations. The department has publicly reported on the FireSmart program and has developed new processes to measure, monitor and report on the results of activities set out in the forest areas' annual wildfire prevention plans. The department is complying with its business rules for internal results reporting by producing the required reports and providing them to senior management. The department has also established timelines and publicly reported on its implementation progress for recommendations and opportunities for improvement from independent external reviews.

Recommendation:

Ensure processes are in place to evaluate and report on wildfire prevention programs

IMPLEMENTED

Context

In 2018, we found that the department did not publicly report details on any activities associated with its directly funded and Indigenous Services Canada FireSmart programs, such as a list of approved and completed projects by forest area, project-specific funding amounts, communities involved or how completed projects help reduce wildfire hazard and risk. This is information Albertans should be made aware of so they can better understand the full extent of the department's efforts and expenditures on wildfire preventative measures to reduce wildfire threat.

⁵¹ *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—November 2018*, pages 45 - 65.

Each forest area prepares an annual wildfire prevention plan that includes information on the forest area, statistical analysis of human caused fires for the previous five years, prevention priorities and the goals and strategies planned to address these issues for the upcoming fire season. As each forest area has its own specific variables (vegetation species composition, terrain, infrastructure, types of population centers, etc.), each independently decides which priorities to consider, what prevention strategies to undertake and how it will complete them. These plans strive to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires and mitigate the impact of wildfires through education, engineering and enforcement activities.

In 2018, we also found that the forest areas were not required to do any year-end results analysis or reporting on the various activities set out in their annual wildfire prevention plans. Without monitoring, analysis and reporting, the department and senior management cannot determine what results were achieved and if the goals and strategies set out in each prevention plan were effective at addressing the issues identified.

Our current findings

Publicly report on its FireSmart programs, including how this work helps reduce wildfire hazard and risk

The department has implemented our recommendation to publicly report on its FireSmart programs, including how this work helps reduce wildfire hazard and risk.⁵²

We found that the department has publicly reported on its 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Alberta FireSmart projects through the Alberta Wildfire website.⁵³ We reviewed both FireSmart project reports and found that they provide:

- a list of completed FireSmart projects for each of the forest areas and the Edmonton FireSmart unit
- funding amounts for each area and unit
- communities involved
- type of FireSmart initiative⁵⁴
- a brief description of each FireSmart project

⁵² *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—November 2018*, page 55.

⁵³ <https://wildfire.alberta.ca/firesmart/default.aspx>

⁵⁴ Initiatives fall into one or more of the seven disciplines of FireSmart (Cross training, Development considerations, Education, Emergency preparedness, Interagency cooperation, Legislation and planning, Vegetation management).

Ensure there are processes in place to measure, monitor and report on the results and effectiveness of the various activities set out in the forest areas' annual wildfire prevention plans

The department has implemented our recommendation to ensure there are processes in place to measure, monitor and report on the results and effectiveness of the various activities set out in the forest areas' annual wildfire prevention plans.⁵⁵

We found that the department developed the following three processes:

- a forest area prevention plan template, developed in 2018, which sets out minimum requirements for Area Prevention Plans, including five-year statistical analysis, goals and strategies and an annual review section
- a Prevention Plan Forest Area tracking summary table, developed in 2019, to capture data and information recorded within the 10 forest areas' prevention plan reports
- an executive summary report, developed in 2019, to compile and report forest area annual plan findings and areas for improvement. These summary reports are discussed at Wildfire Prevention Group (WFPG) meetings and posted on the WFPG SharePoint site for staff access.

A review of documents provided by the department show these processes are being followed.

Recommendation:

Comply with business rules for internal reviews results reporting and establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations from external reviews

IMPLEMENTED

Context

The department's Wildfire Management Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and business rules outline the policies and procedures for the internal review and improvement program. These set out what reports are to be prepared, what information is required in each report and who the reports are sent to for review and approval. The department reviews and updates the SOP and business rules annually.

In 2018, we found that the department was not complying with its business rules for internal results reporting for the review and improvement program, as a number of reports were not being completed or sent to senior management for review.

⁵⁵ *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—November 2018*, page 55.

In our original audit, we found the department had commissioned three independent external reviews, from which it received a number of recommendations and opportunities for improvements (OFI):

Review Recommendations

Review	Recommendations
The 2011 Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review (Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review Committee)	21 recommendations
Wildfire Management Program and the 2015 Fire Season Review (MNP)	4 recommendations 18 opportunities for improvement
2016 Horse River Wildfire Review (MNP)	10 recommendations 11 opportunities for improvement

In 2018, we also found that the department had no timelines or target completion dates for the remaining outstanding recommendations and OFI from the 2015 and 2016 reviews that it could use to measure and monitor expected implementation progress. We found the department had yet to publicly report on the implementation progress for recommendations from the 2015 fire season review.

Our current findings

Comply with its established business rules for internal results reporting for the review and improvement program

The department has implemented our recommendation to comply with its established business rules for internal results reporting for the review and improvement program.⁵⁶

We found that the department has conducted annual internal reporting of results from the internal review and improvement program according to its business rules and standard operating procedures. We reviewed the 2019 provincial summary report and the annual review document for 2020 and confirmed that both reports have been completed and reviewed and approved by management according to the 2020 business rules.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—November 2018*, page 58.

Establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations and opportunities for improvement from independent external reviews and publicly report implementation progress against these

The department has implemented our recommendation to establish and monitor implementation timelines for recommendations and opportunities for improvement from independent external reviews and publicly report implementation progress against these.⁵⁷

We found the department has established implementation target completion dates for recommendations and OFI from these independent external reviews that are still in-progress. This includes its most recent external review, the Spring 2019 Wildfire Review, which was publicly reported in November 2020 and contains 15 recommendations and 13 OFI.⁵⁸

We also confirmed that the department monitors and reports internally on the implementation progress of outstanding review recommendations and OFI through detailed status update reports for the 2015 and 2016 reviews, ongoing updates to the Spring 2019 review implementation plan, internal meetings, presentations and briefing notes.

As of December 2020, the department has publicly reported on the implementation progress of recommendations and OFI for each of these reviews on the Wildfire Alberta website.⁵⁹ The status for each recommendation and OFI is provided as well as highlights of activities completed for implementation.

⁵⁷ *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta—November 2018*, page 58.

⁵⁸ <https://wildfire.alberta.ca/resources/reviews/2019-wildfire-review.aspx>

⁵⁹ <https://wildfire.alberta.ca/resources/reviews/default.aspx>