Be Fire Smart: Living Safely Near Forests

Wildfires are a natural part of forest ecosystems. Without wildfire, the landscape loses its diversity. Wildfires recycle nutrients, help plants reproduce and create a mosaic of vegetation that provides habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Because our community and cottages are near forested areas, we are exposed to the natural danger of wildfire. There are steps you can take to reduce the risk of wildfire to your home or cottage and help firefighters to defend your home, while still maintaining some wildlife habitat that we all enjoy.

Wildfires can ignite and/or spread by three modes: convection, resulting in flying embers or firebrands; conduction (direct flame contact); and radiation (radiant heat).

There are three types of wildland fires, differentiated by the way they burn.

Ground fires move through the ground, specifically the duff layer, which contains organic soils and woody material, that exists beneath the forest floor. These fires burn slowly, are persistent and are difficult to extinguish.

Surface fires burn needles, twigs and branches that are on the forest floor, as well as young trees and lower branches of standing trees. High wind conditions are a key factor in the spread of surface fires.

Crown fires are those that burn in upper foliage and branches, in addition to burning surface and ground fuels. Ladder fuels provide vertical continuity between (or connect) surface vegetation and tree crowns; and promotes the upward spread of surface fires into the upper foliage. When high-intensity surface fires spread, or climb upward through foliage into tree canopies, they become crown fires, which are influenced by wind and upper atmospheric conditions. Crown fires travel quickly and are difficult to control.

Around your home or cottage, the changes made to the areas closest to your buildings will have the greatest impact to reducing your risk of wildfire damage.

Consider using fire-rated materials when you are building and maintaining your buildings. A spark arrestor on your chimney will reduce the chance of sparks and embers from escaping and starting fires. Vents should be screened with non-combustible screening to prevent sparks and embers from entering. Regularly inspect your roof and gutters and remove debris that may ignite in the dry materials. Don't store firewood beside your home or cottage.

1.5 metres: keep a zone of non-combustible materials around your buildings and deck to prevent fire from directly contacting and igniting them.

1.5 to 10 metres: manage the trees to have fire resistant trees here. Evergreen trees such as spruce, balsam fir and pine trees contain combustible resins, so they increase the intensity of a

forest fire, particularly when multiple evergreen trees are touching each other. Their lower branches create ladder fuels, moving a ground fire into the crown. Deciduous trees, when the leaves are on, contain moisture and may slow the intensity and rate of fire spread. Regular raking of the forest floor to remove flammable debris will also help to protect your buildings.

10 to 30 metres: thin evergreen trees and prune off their lower branches up to 2 metres from the forest floor to reduce the fire hazard in this area. Regularly clean up accumulations of fallen branches, dry grass and needles from the ground to eliminate potential surface fuels.

30 to 100 metres: Look for opportunities to create a fire break by creating space between trees and other potentially flammable vegetation. Thinning and pruning vegetation is effective ~~here as well~~.

In addition to your efforts to reduce forest fire hazards on your property, the Town of Nipigon is also working to assess and reduce the risk of wildfire to our community. You'll here more about this in the fall and will have an opportunity to help. Let's be fire smart and safe together!

For more information on being fire smart, check out **FireSmartCanada.ca**