



# Media Release

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For Immediate Release

## **PAGC calls mitigation crews ‘unsung heroes’ of wildfire prevention**

(Pre-Confederation, Treaty 5, 6, 8 & 10) PRINCE ALBERT, Sask. – Forest mitigation crews are already at work across Saskatchewan, with about 100 people currently deployed on the land months before wildfire season reaches its peak.

They are cutting hazardous fuels, thinning dense forest stands and opening fire guards — months before wildfire season reaches its peak — to reduce the risk of fires reaching homes and communities.

The Prince Albert Grand Council says the early, largely unseen work is critical.

“This work is about prevention, not reaction,” said Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte of the Prince Albert Grand Council. “When mitigation is done properly, it can mean the difference between a wildfire being contained and a community being forced to evacuate.”

Forest mitigation and FireSmart crews work months — and sometimes years — ahead of wildfire season.

The work does not happen during emergencies. It happens quietly, outside the spotlight, and focuses on reducing risk before fires are already out of control.

“Our work doesn’t make headlines,” said Issac Custer, a forest mitigation crew leader. “If we do our job right, the fire may never become a disaster.”

PAGC communities have seen what happens when fires move quickly and mitigation is limited.

In recent wildfire seasons, communities across northern Saskatchewan have faced repeated large-scale evacuations, destroyed homes and recovery efforts that continue years later.

Forest mitigation and FireSmart work includes clearing hazardous fuels around homes and infrastructure, thinning dense forest stands, opening and maintaining fire guards, and creating defensible space around critical assets.

Priority areas include residential zones, schools and health centres, power lines, evacuation routes and access corridors.

“These crews are the unsung heroes of wildfire prevention,” said Pierce Pellerin, PAGC’s Director of Forestry. “They’re on the land long before smoke is in the air, doing difficult, skilled work that most people never see. When a fire slows down or never reaches a community, this is often why.”

In Indigenous communities, mitigation also includes protecting traplines, harvesting areas and culturally significant sites, as well as traditional land-use areas where land-based knowledge has been passed down through generations.

Forest mitigation is physically demanding and highly skilled work.

Crews operate in dense bush and uneven terrain, often in extreme cold and variable weather, including remote locations across Saskatchewan where access is limited and conditions can change quickly.

The work requires specialized training, experience and an understanding of forest behaviour and fire dynamics, and is carried out using chainsaws, hand tools and other specialized equipment.

Research shows FireSmart-treated areas can significantly reduce fire intensity and improve firefighter safety.

Proper thinning can prevent crown fires from developing. Reduced fuel loads can slow fire spread. And firefighters are given a chance to engage fires rather than retreat.

PAGC forestry crews are currently working on 11 active wildfire mitigation projects across Saskatchewan, including Camsell Portage, Cypress Hills, Grandmother’s Bay, Lac La Ronge, Timber Bay and Duck Mountain.

Crews are expected to mitigate about 100 hectares of forested land this season to reduce wildfire risk near homes and critical infrastructure.

“The goal is simple,” Custer said. “Reduce the risk before communities are forced into emergency mode.”

“If we do the work early, and we do it right, people may never know how close a fire came,” he said.

### **About Prince Albert Grand Council:**

The Prince Albert Grand Council is one of the largest tribal councils in Canada with a membership of over 44,000, representing 12 First Nations and the 28 northern communities in the territories of Treaty 5, 6, 8 & 10. To learn more, visit [pagc.sk.ca](http://pagc.sk.ca).

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