



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Distribution

First Nation Leaders Demand Action as Wildfire Forces Sandy Bay Evacuation

(Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, Treaty 6 Territory) — The leadership of Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN) and Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) is urgently calling for immediate action and accountability from the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency (SPSA) in response to the escalating Flanagan Fire, which has forced the evacuation of Sandy Bay.

The leadership had proactively launched its virtual Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in early July in response to wildfires affecting Denare Beach and Creighton. As fires advanced near its community of Deschambeault Lake, the resulting smoke necessitated the relocation of 89 members who were high-risk individuals along with their families in order to provide them with respite. This decision was prompted by the rising number of community members who were seeking health care at the health centre for respiratory issues.

Chief Peter Beatty emphasized that the fire situation has been under close surveillance, and while earlier containment could have prevented the current crisis, the situation is now demanding the full evacuation of the Sandy Bay community.

In response to the current emergency, Chief Peter Beatty is urgently advocating for the immediate recruitment of hundreds of First Nation firefighters trained at the Type 3 level to help bring the crisis under control.

"There are hundreds of qualified First Nations firefighters ready and willing to assist, but the SPSA has refused to hire them, claiming it is too dangerous. Their reasoning? A lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPE). They say that our firefighters only have cotton overalls instead of the Nomex fabric coveralls required for fighting these intense fires," stated Chief Beatty.

"This is unacceptable. PAGC's Saskatchewan First Nations Emergency Management (SFNEM) has access to the necessary gear, including fire hats and boots. Our firefighters have the same training as others. They are fit, experienced, and ready to help, but they are being sidelined due to a lack of proper gear. We can outfit 100 or more of our firefighters with the necessary coveralls if given the opportunity. The real issue seems to be a lack of commitment to putting out the fire, not the capability of our firefighters."

Chief Beatty stressed that refusing to deploy qualified First Nations firefighters is not only a serious oversight but a dangerous excuse that endangers lives and communities.



“We cannot stand by while excuses are made. Our people are ready to protect their land, but they are being denied the opportunity because the SPSA isn’t prioritizing the resources needed to ensure their safety. It feels like they do not want to put the fire out,” he said.

In addition, Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte of PAGC argues that the current approach to fire management is not only inadequate but also negligent in its disregard for the well-being of Indigenous communities in Northern Saskatchewan.

“This isn’t just a policy failure; it’s a failure of leadership and moral responsibility of the provincial government. Prioritizing economic considerations over human lives and environmental protection is both short-sighted and dangerous. These aren’t just remote forests—they are our homes, our sacred lands, and our future. To let them burn without doing everything possible to extinguish the flames is an unforgivable betrayal of our trust,” said Grand Chief Hardlotte.

“Our people deserve better than to be overlooked in the name of convenience or cost-saving measures. The ‘Let It Burn’ policy must be abandoned, and a new approach must be adopted—one that puts the safety of lives, homes, and the environment first. We cannot and will not stand by while our lands and communities are left to burn,” he continued.

PBCN extends its deep gratitude to the frontline workers, firefighters, and volunteers protecting the community.

PBCN’s community of Sandy Bay is located approximately 90 kilometers north of Pelican Narrows at the end of Highway 135, and 195 kilometers southwest of Creighton, SK, and Flin Flon, MB. Its population is approx. 1,800.

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About PBCN:

PBCN or Assin'skowitziniwak ("People of the Rocky Area"), has a rich history in northeastern Saskatchewan. With over 12,000 members across nine communities spanning 51,000 square kilometres, PBCN is a cornerstone of the region. Its nine communities include Denare Beach, Deschaumbault Lake, Kinoosao, Pelican Narrows, Prince Albert, Sandy Bay, Southend, Sturgeon Landing, and Birch Portage.

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