



EIPCCP

ENGAGEMENT
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

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Newsletter

ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, CONSERVATION, AND BIODIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

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Pronounced /'isko,te:w/

FIRE

The nation is on fire.

As of June 28, there are over 480 wildfires burning across 10 provinces and two territories. Of those fires, more than 250 are out of control. This catastrophe has resulted in more than 76,000 square kilometres of burnt land, making 2023 the worst year for Canadian wildfires on record.

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Cree word for Fire

When people think of April, they often imagine spring showers, fresh blooms, and mesmerizing pink sunsets. This year, however, many Canadians experienced it as the start of a harrowing season filled with all-encompassing smoke, blazing wildfires, and emergency evacuations.



THE NATION IS ON FIRE.

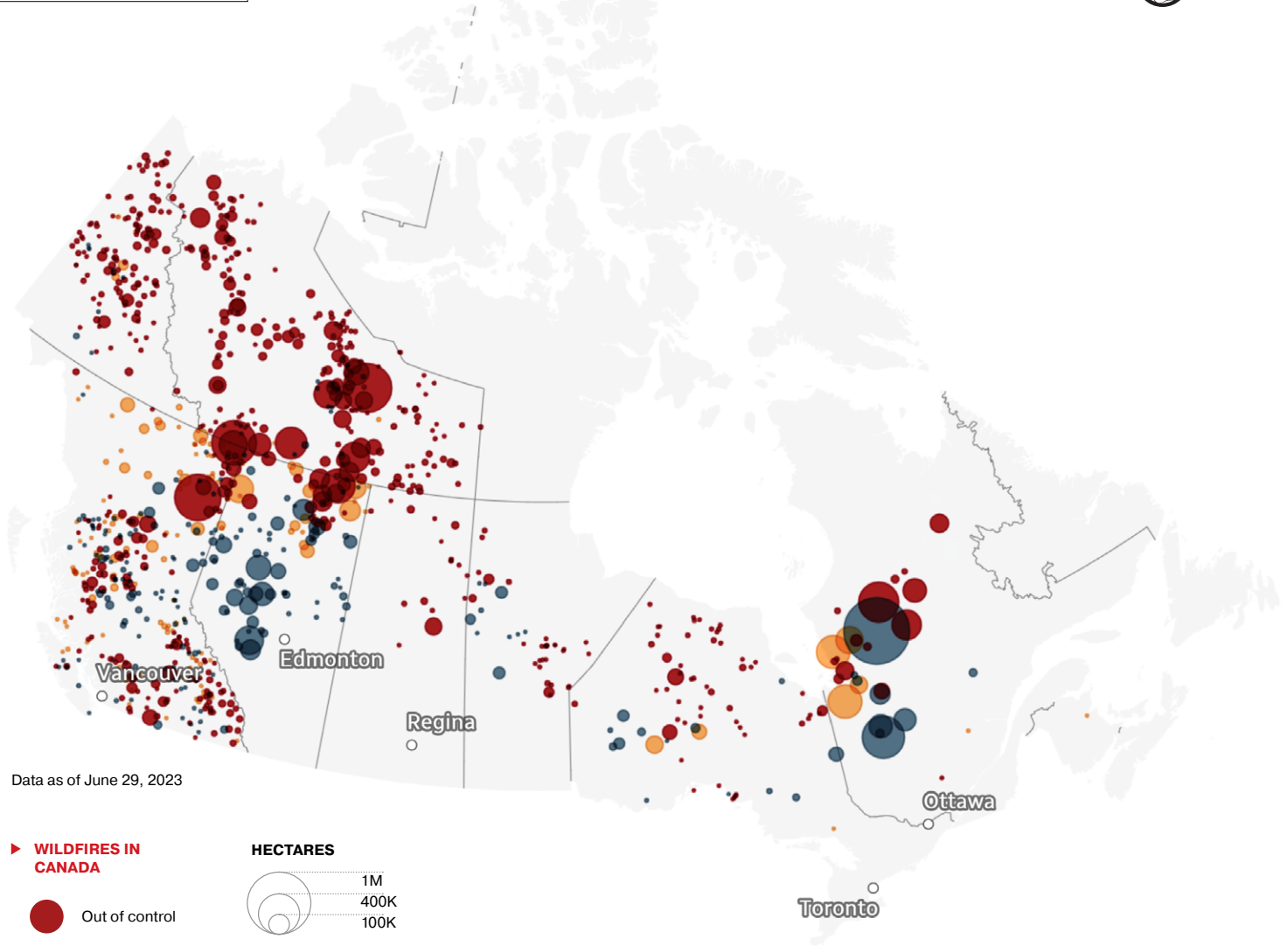
As of June 28, there are over 480 wildfires burning across [10 provinces and two territories](#). Of those fires, more than 250 are out of control. This catastrophe has resulted in more than [76,000 square kilometres](#) of burnt land, making 2023 the worst year for Canadian wildfires on [record](#). Unfortunately, the fires will not burn out any time soon, as it is [anticipated](#) to only get worse as we enter summer.

Although wildfires are common in Canada, the simultaneous distribution of fires from coast to

coast is [unusual](#). “At this time of the year, fires usually occur only on one side of the country at a time, most often that being in the west,” said [Michael Norton](#), an official with Natural Resources Canada. And these far-stretched flames are now burning regions rarely affected by so many wildfires, such as parts of [Quebec](#). Though it’s not simply that there are more fires which are growing larger; these wildfires are significantly more intense – meaning they are burning landscapes much more aggressively, which is producing powerful smoke expanding higher into the sky and travelling farther distances.

► **WILDFIRE CATASTROPHE IN CANADA**

has resulted in more than 76,000 square kilometres of burnt land, making 2023 the worst year for Canadian wildfires on record.



“By 2090, global wildfires are expected to increase in intensity by up to 57% thanks to climate change, a *United Nations report* warned last year.”

- THE GUARDIAN



This crisis is not escapable. No matter where you are, you likely feel the **impacts**.

This is Mother Earth’s undeniable display of climate change. Global warming has kindled **unprecedented events** such as droughts, heat waves, lightning storms, and dry conditions

resulting in parched vegetation. Such **conditions** have created the perfect environment for wildfires to start and multiply across Canada’s diverse landscapes. This has put the nation in an extreme state of emergency, with tens of thousands of people displaced from their homes and firefighting resources stretched beyond capacity.



“Displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their territories stretches back to the *Indian Act* and the inception of reserves. Now, the climate crisis is creating a second exodus, [in which] Indigenous Peoples may become the first climate refugees in Canada.”

- ROSALYN BOUCHA

A 2021 [study](#) found that Indigenous communities, particularly those living on-reserve and in rural regions, have been disproportionately affected by wildfires, making up almost one-third of all evacuees and evacuation events in recent decades. This goes beyond climate change explanations. While climate change has driven the natural disasters that are devastating Indigenous lands, it is their predisposition to marginalization that puts Indigenous Peoples at greater risk. As [Sandy Erni](#) stated: “Climate is just one side of the coin, the other is human society itself.”

You see, we live in a world where marginalized communities, like Indigenous Peoples—especially women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse (WG2SGD) People—are viewed as peripheral [others](#) and whose wellbeing is repetitively compromised for more prioritized matters or communities in society.

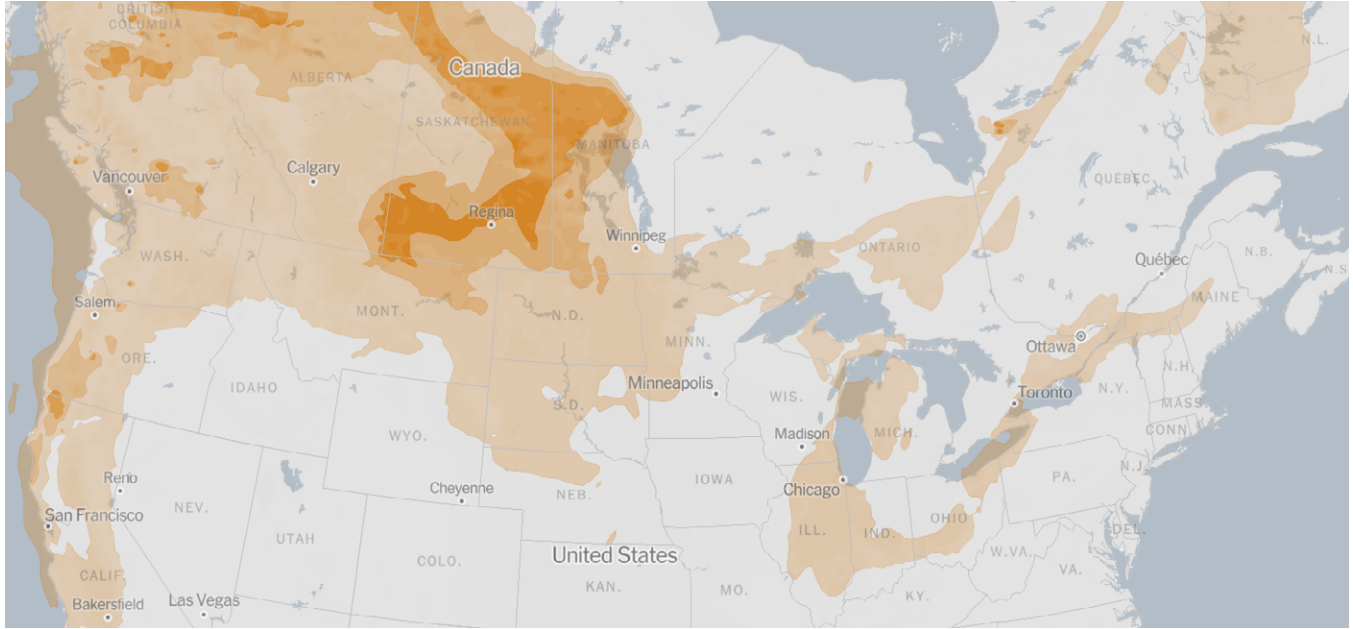


Being marginalized has meant that Indigenous WG2SGD People lack access to basic needs such as clean drinking water, adequate medical resources, sufficient food, emergency services, and easy transportation. They also have limited funding or supports to help them navigate these challenges.

When wildfires occur and displace Indigenous WG2SGD People, they not only are faced with the hardships of a natural disaster, but they are having to do so while already enduring the impactful systemic oppressions that weigh on their daily life.



▼ **THICK SMOKE FROM THE FOX LAKE FIRE** can be seen from the barge landing on Little Red River Cree Nation in northern Alberta. /source: Jarvis Nanooch



► **MAPS:**
Tracking Air Quality and
smoke from Canada Wildfires,
Data from June 5, 2023

Indigenous communities now find themselves as the **least contributing group** to climate change, yet the most impacted by its fiery wrath. Elders and **children** have been distressed and separated from their cultural lands. **Pregnant** Indigenous women, who already face **multi-directional obstacles**, have been forcefully put at a health risk due to smoke inhalation. Moreover, the fact that **Indigenous land management practices**, such as **cultural burns** are increasingly not being prioritized, makes it glaringly clear that long-standing marginalization principles have permitted this crisis in Indigenous communities and the land they steward.

“By the end of the century, climate change could double the acreage burned by wildfires each year, according to *Canada’s natural resources agency*.”
- **THE GUARDIAN**





▼ **SPREADING CREEK WILDFIRE**

Saskatchewan River Crossing, Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada, July, 2023

▶ **MOST MEMBERS OF THE ALGONQUINS OF BARRIERE LAKE**

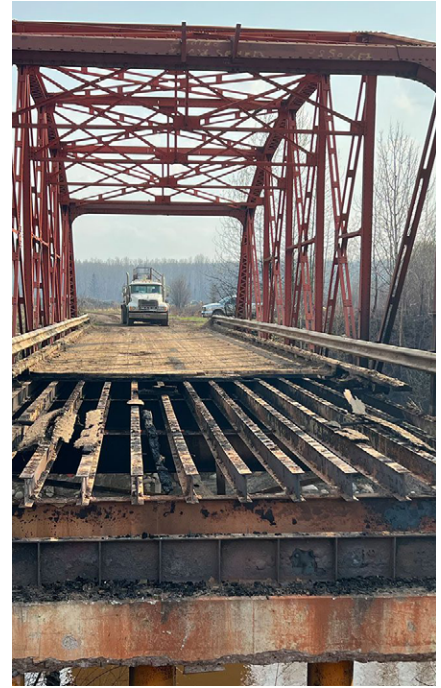
were sent on Sunday to Maniwaki, Gatineau and Ottawa, due to heavy smoke.
/ photo: Charlie Papatie



“Any lasting solution to the ongoing environmental disasters requires complete solidarity with Indigenous nations in their struggle to dismantle settler colonialism and reclaim their stolen lands.”

- NARWHAL

► **FORREST WILDFIRE**
Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, Summer, 2023
/photo: agilard, shutterstock



LEFT PHOTO:

▶ **DAMAGED PROPERTY** from recent wildfires is shown in Drayton Valley, Alta. May 17, 2023

RIGHT PHOTO:

▶ **A BRIDGE** on Eastern Prairie Metis Settlements in Alberta burned down during the 2023 wildfires. / photo: Metis Settlements General Council

HOW TO HELP:

With hot and dry conditions predicted to last until September, we can expect the wildfires to spread for months to come. Though there is no knowing what exactly will happen, one thing is for certain—these are undoubtedly desperate times, but together, we will survive.

Here are some ways you can [help](#):

1 Odawa Native Friendship Centre

The Odawa NFC is a non-profit organization serving the Indigenous community in the Ottawa-Carleton region and is currently collecting [donations](#) for First Nation evacuees.

2 Donate a mask

Because of hazardous smoke and air pollution, wearing a mask is recommended when

braving the outdoors. [Donate a Mask](#) is a volunteer-run charity that ships free N95-equivalent respirator masks to anyone in Canada who requests them.

3 True North Aid

This charity is dedicated to supporting northern and remote Indigenous communities in Canada with barriers such as accessing goods and services, inequalities in health and wellness, income, food, and housing. [True North Aid](#) believes that self-governance and self-determination is key to addressing the complex issues that Indigenous communities face. Many communities who were directly hit by this year’s wildfires could lean on services like this to get back on their feet.