



Keeping the “Know” in Nova Scotia: Wildfires

Wildfires are becoming more frequent, destructive and intense due to human activities that have destabilized the climate and degraded our forests. At home and abroad, wildfires are taking an unprecedented toll on ecosystems and human health. But more sustainable forestry practices, strong climate action and landscape-level planning can help reduce these risks to keep our province and communities safer.

The characteristically long-lived forests in Nova Scotia are not fire driven ecosystems — fire is not the primary agent of forest disturbance or renewal — so wildfires like we’ve seen in recent years are not normal here. The Wabanaki-Acadian forest is naturally less prone to wildfires than forests in other parts of the country due to our wet climate, natural fire breaks (lakes, watercourses, wetlands and coasts) and our native mixed-species, mixed-aged forests.

Less fire-prone:

- Hardwood trees
- Older trees and forests
- Mixed-aged forests
- Mixed-species forests
- Forests that aren’t sprayed with herbicides

More fire-prone:

- Softwood trees
- Younger trees and forests
- Single-aged forests
- Monocultures and less species-diverse forests
- Forests that are sprayed with herbicides



Industrial forestry practices are making Nova Scotia's forests more susceptible to wildfire. Decades of clearcutting, replanting softwoods and spraying herbicides have replaced much of the naturally fire-resistant Wabanaki-Acadian forests with young softwood plantations. Due to their high resin content, softwood trees are naturally more flammable than hardwoods. Experts warn that the increase in softwood plantations, along with more frequent and longer periods of drought, has turned much of the landscape into a potential tinderbox, making wildfires burn more intensely and spread more easily.

Meanwhile, the loss of old forests as a result of clear-cutting and other heavy harvests results in less shade, exposing the forest floor to the desiccating effects of the sun and wind. This creates hotter temperatures and dramatically reduces moisture in the forests, thus making them more susceptible to wildfires.

The industrial forestry industry often sprays glyphosate-based herbicides to kill hardwood trees that try to grow back after heavy harvests. This further increases wildfire risk by drying out the forest as well as killing species that tend to be less fire prone (hardwoods) in favour of those that tend to be more fire prone (softwoods).

From unsustainable forestry practices to dependence on fossil fuels, we know the risk factors that have been making wildfires more likely and more severe. But that means we also know what we need to do to address and lower those risks.

To better protect people and communities, all levels of government must take serious, meaningful action.

For our recommendations, references and more information, please see the full version of this factsheet at ecologyaction.ca/Keeping-theKnow-in-NS

