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## Preparing for the unavoidable reality of future wildfires

As Canadians continue to process the horror and heartbreak of the wildfires of 2023, a survey by the non-profit Angus Reid Institute found that more than half of Canadians say they are expecting even worse fire conditions in the future.

More than 15 million hectares across Canada have been ravaged by fire this year - more than double the previous record of 1989 and shattering the 10-year average of 2.5 million hectares.

It is an unavoidable reality that climate change is contributing to conditions that are going to mean future widespread wildfire activity – though possibly not as severe as this summer.

We need to invest and focus on ways to adapt to that reality – to make our communities prepared and resilient while simultaneously doubling down on Canada's actions to reduce the emissions behind climate change.

### Adaptation strategy

In June, the Federal Government released Canada's first nation-wide climate adaptation strategy. It aims to better prepare the country and to set a shared path for greater resilience to climate change.

The National Adaptation Strategy is the product of two years of intense engagement with provinces and territories, Indigenous partners, key experts, stakeholders and partners across Canada.

It lays out an agreed-upon framework to take proactive measures to reduce climate impacts before they occur, build and maintain resilient infrastructure, improve health outcomes, protect nature and biodiversity and support a strong economy.

The Strategy also identifies common goals, objectives, and targets to focus the efforts of governments and communities across these key areas and to help ensure future investments are targeted, coordinated, ambitious and effective.

The primary responsibility for response to natural disasters such as wildfires and floods in Canada rests with provinces and territories. Local and regional adaptation plans are in place in many parts of the country and are well positioned to set priorities and advance action based on highest risks and local circumstances.

At the national level, a series of action plans are being developed to better coordinate execution and improve support for local actions – while respecting the jurisdiction and responsibilities of different orders of government and rights holders.

### "Whole-of-Canada" approach

Success in achieving the National Adaptation Strategy's goals and objectives will require a whole-of-Canada approach: municipal, regional, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous peoples and governing bodies, the private sector, professional associations, organized labour, academic institutions, researchers, scientists, communities and individuals. We will all need to be part of the solution.

The role of the national government in a country as vast as Canada is to engage, coordinate and provide resources and financial support. A federal national disaster response agency is under consideration.

Since 2015, the Government of Canada has invested more than \$6.5 billion in adaptation. When disaster relief is factored in, federal investments exceed \$10 billion with further significant investments required.

One can never say to the thousands of Canadians who lost their homes that enough is being done. They've been profoundly and forever impacted.

But at the end of the day, we must and will continue to do everything we possibly can. Canadians should expect nothing less of their leaders at all levels and of all political stripes in the face of this critical challenge.

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