



*June 15, 2009*

## **Provincial firefighters battle 22 out of control wildfires**

### ***Flames force closure of Highway 63 south of Fort McMurray***

**Edmonton...** Lightning activity continues to ignite wildfires throughout northern Alberta forests. As of 2:30 p.m. June 15, Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) firefighters were working to contain a total of 72 wildfires, 22 of which are classified as out of control.

Wildfires of note, identified by the nearest affected community include:

Slave Lake area - Two out of control wildfires are burning near the community of Loon Lake. Both fires started on the weekend; as of mid-day Monday, they covered close to 5000 hectares in size.

Lac La Biche - Two out-of-control wildfires are burning in the region, including one north of Rock Lake and the other near the summer village of Baptiste Lake. Both fires started on Saturday and totalled over 3600 hectares as of mid-day Monday.

Fort McMurray - Four out-of-control wildfires are burning in the region, including one that has closed Highway 63 south of the community. The duration of the closure is not known at this time; meanwhile, all motorists are directed to use Highway 881. Electronic boards are being deployed in the area to inform motorists of the closure and the Highway 881 detour. All four fires started Saturday and had covered more than 6200 hectares as of mid-day Monday. Heavy smoke is expected to drift into Fort McMurray over the next several days as firefighters continue to battle the blazes.

For more information about road conditions, please call 1-866-772-9152.

More lightning activity is forecast across the province in the coming days, which is expected to contribute to additional wildfires. There are currently 480 firefighting personnel, 22 airtankers, 65 helicopters and various other pieces of heavy equipment fighting these wildfires.

Since the April 1 start of the fire season, Alberta has responded to 861 wildfires in the province's forested area, which have burned more than 23,000 hectares of land. So far this fire season, Alberta has experienced a 20-per-cent increase in the number of wildfires compared to the five-year average.

To report a wildfire, call 310-FIRE (3473).

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**Media inquiries may be directed to:**

Wildfire Information Officer

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