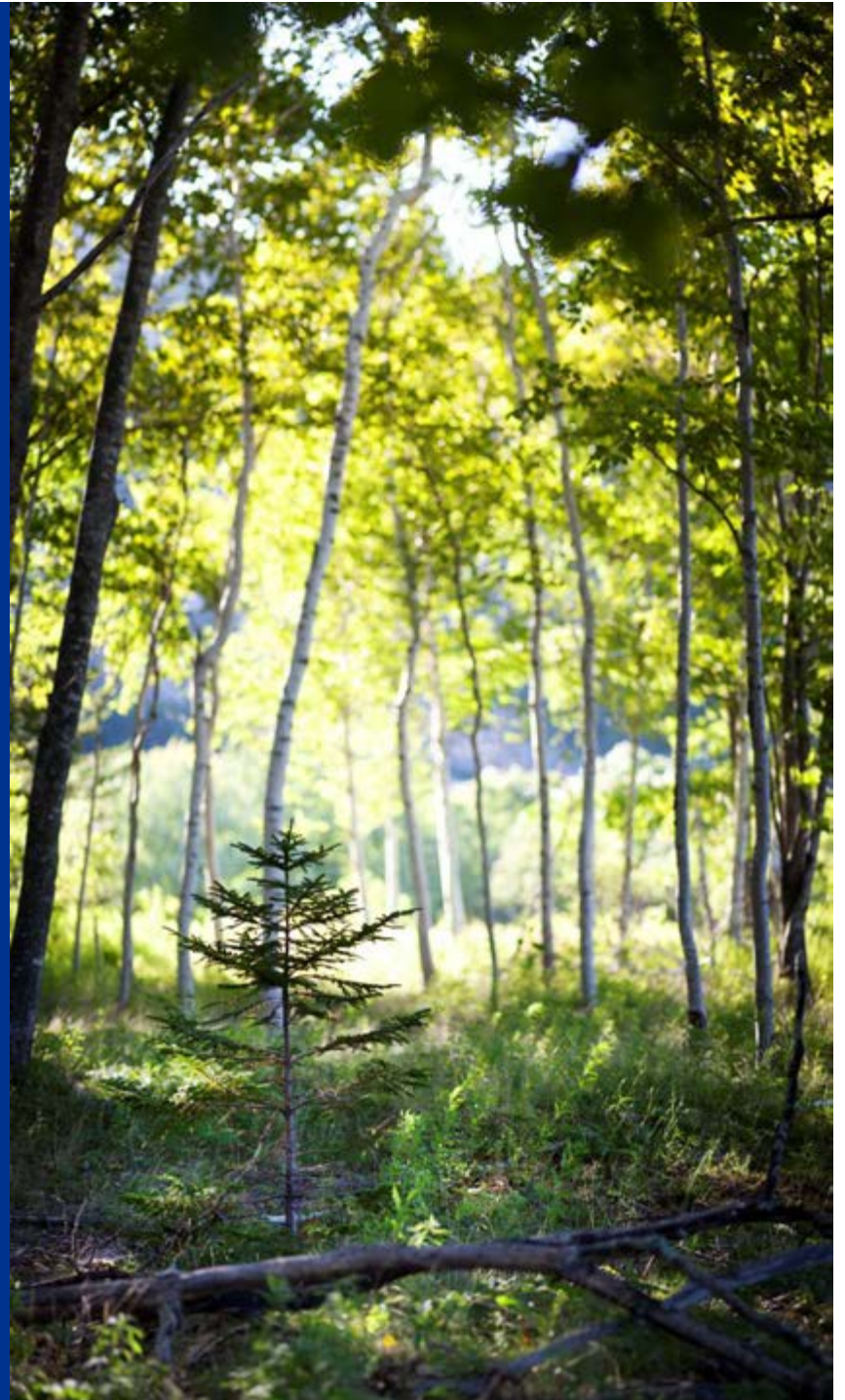




Building Disaster Resiliency – Lessons Learned from the Fort McMurray Wildfires

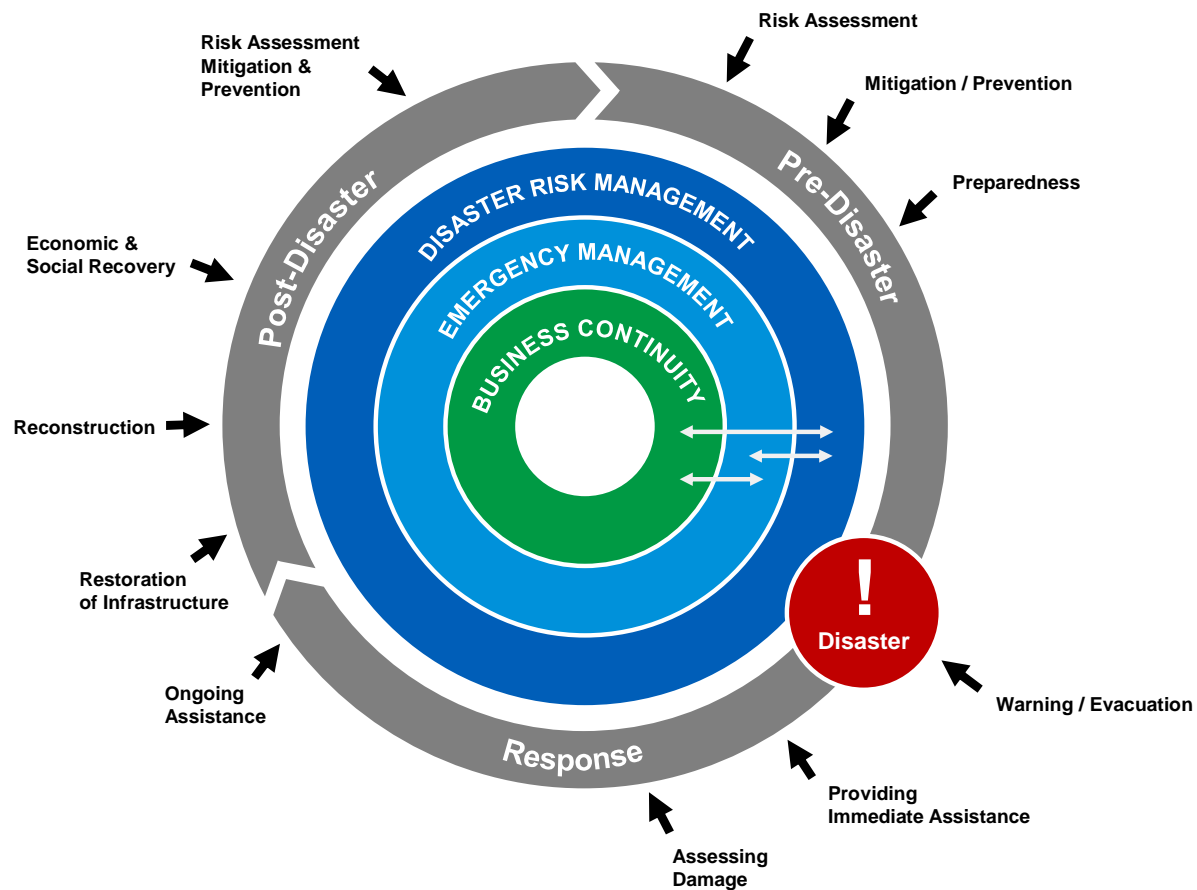
**Presentation at the
AAC Conference**

April 23, 2018



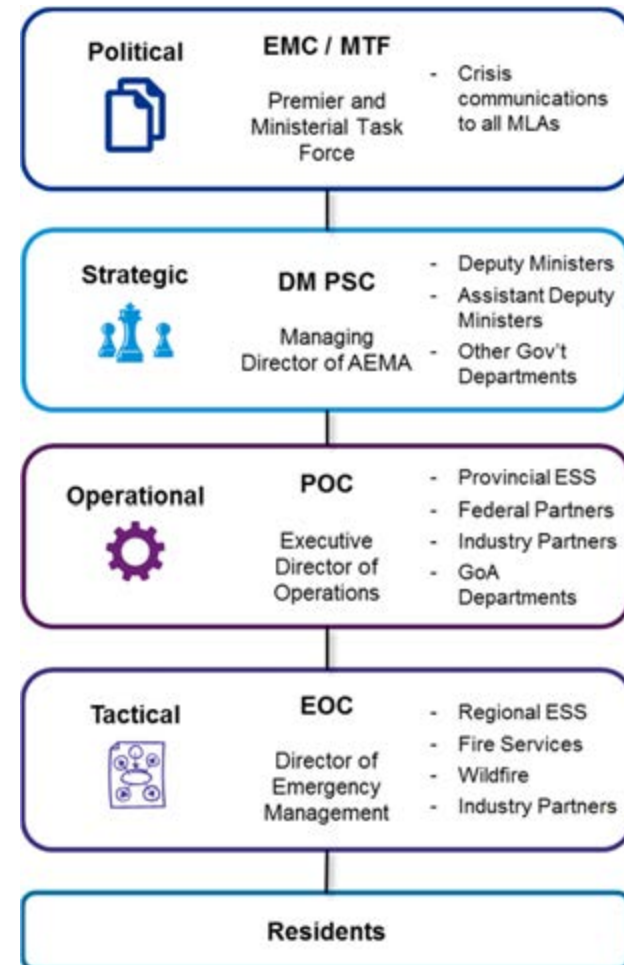
Context

There are differences between disaster risk management, emergency management, and business continuity; each are needed to help ensure success during and following a disaster.



Emergency Management in Alberta

- Emergency management responsibilities are shared by all levels of government.
- Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) leads the coordination, collaboration, and cooperation of all organizations involved in the prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters and emergencies for Alberta.
- However, municipal governments play a critical role in emergency management as the first responders to an emergency.
 - This requires them to have plans and resources in place to respond effectively to emergencies within their communities.



MTF – Municipal Task Force, coordinated through the Cabinet Coordination Office, supported by the DM PSC

DM PSC – Deputy Minister Public Safety Committee

EMC – Emergency Management Committee

ESS – Emergency Social Services

POC – Provincial Operations Centre

EOC – Emergency Operations Centre



How we conducted the review

What we were asked to do

- KPMG was asked to conduct a formal review (also known as post-incident assessment) of the May 2016 Horse River Wildfire
 - Reviews were completed from the AEMA and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo perspectives
- The process was not about blame or liability.
- Focus was on how to enhance emergency management capabilities, to identify successful lessons learned and to capture recommendations emerging from this disaster.
- Both reports led to learnings and changes to emergency management practices for both the Province and the RMWB to be better prepared for future emergency events.

How we conducted the review



Online Surveys

Online surveys were distributed to a variety of stakeholders, including local businesses, and residents.



Engagement

Individuals representing AEMA, the RMWB, and their emergency management partners were engaged. This also included First Nation and Metis communities.



Documentation

Stakeholders provided documentation which was used to corroborate information gathered through conversations.



Analysis

Thorough analysis of the findings identified key themes and opportunities for improvement.



Validation

Once findings were gathered, validation sessions were conducted to confirm the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations.

Our EM review framework

KPMG used a formal evaluation framework to conduct our reviews. This framework is based on formally recognized emergency management, response, and recovery frameworks.





What we found



Prevention & Mitigation

Emergency Legislation

- In an emergency, several pieces of legislation (e.g. *Emergency Management Act*, *Public Health Act*, and *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*), provide extraordinary powers and authorities to those responsible for ensuring the safety and care of all citizens. However, we found mixed reports on decision-making authorities due to different interpretations of the interplay of the legislation.

Disaster Prevention Measures

- Disaster prevention and preparedness is not always top of mind for many people or municipalities because it is often a ‘what if’ scenario. However, without proper preparations, and ongoing support for disaster risk management programs (e.g. FireSmart), it is difficult for individuals and municipalities to know how to handle the variety of emergencies that may arise (e.g. fire, flood, hazardous waste spill, terrorism attack, etc.).

“FireSmart is a good way of preventing future disasters, and FireSmart community designs and planning need to be part of every community that borders forested areas.”

- Resident



Prevention & Mitigation

\$800,000

spent Provincially in 2015 / 16
on the FireSmart Program

- There is a need for ongoing investment in prevention and mitigation activities for disasters so that when a disaster occurs, the impacts to a community and its residents are minimized. Research has shown that upfront investments in disaster prevention can reduce the future costs of recovery from a disaster.



Preparedness

Emergency Preparedness

- The outset of the wildfire coincided with Emergency Preparedness Week. However, many residents reported being unprepared for an emergency as they lacked emergency plans and 72 hour kits for themselves and their families.

It is important that all Albertans understand their role in prevention and mitigation activities (e.g. applying FireSmart principles in their homes and communities), and be prepared for an emergency.

Emergency Preparedness Week

is an annual event that takes place each year during the first full week of May. This national event is coordinated by Public Safety Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories and partners.

More information about emergency preparedness week can be found at:

www.aema.alberta.ca/emergency-preparedness-week



Response

Evacuation

- The proximity of Fort McMurray to Industry operations reinforcing a safety culture within the community, as well as the younger demographic of residents, ensured that over 88,000 residents evacuated from Fort McMurray and the surrounding area within a few hours.
- Unfortunately, as the evacuation continued, two young lives were lost on May 4 in a traffic accident along Highway 881.

*“I was **impressed by the police and firefighters going door to door** and keeping everyone moving. They did an amazing job in a challenging situation.”*

- Resident

*“**It was chaos** trying to reach schools to pick up children. It was almost impossible to get from one end of the city to the other...”*

- Resident

*“Everything happened so quickly, **they made the best decisions they could** with the information they had”*

- Resident



Response

Pet Rescue

- Pets are increasingly being considered part of the family unit, and as such, need to be part of emergency planning for both individuals and municipalities. As evacuation occurred mid-afternoon with little warning, many residents were unable to return home for their pets and had to leave them behind.

“My pets were locked in my house. We found it frustrating at the time, but they did a great job with the pet rescue, and keeping us informed during the process.”

- Resident

1,300 animals were rescued and evacuated from the RMWB, with an additional 200 – 300 that were cared for in place. Rescued animals included cats, dogs, reptiles and snakes!



Recovery

Rapid Damage Assessments

- The RMWB was uniquely able to provide residents with a visual assessment of the extent of damage to their homes prior to re-entry to the community. Through Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping completed the year prior to the Wildfire, residents were able to see pre-fire and post-fire images of their homes.
- Providing residents with information about their homes allowed them to start planning for their return to the community, and prepared them for what they would be returning to. In addition, these assessments were able to assist the RMWB with appropriate re-entry and recovery planning.

Before Fire (2015)



After Fire (2016)





Resilience

Building Community Resilience

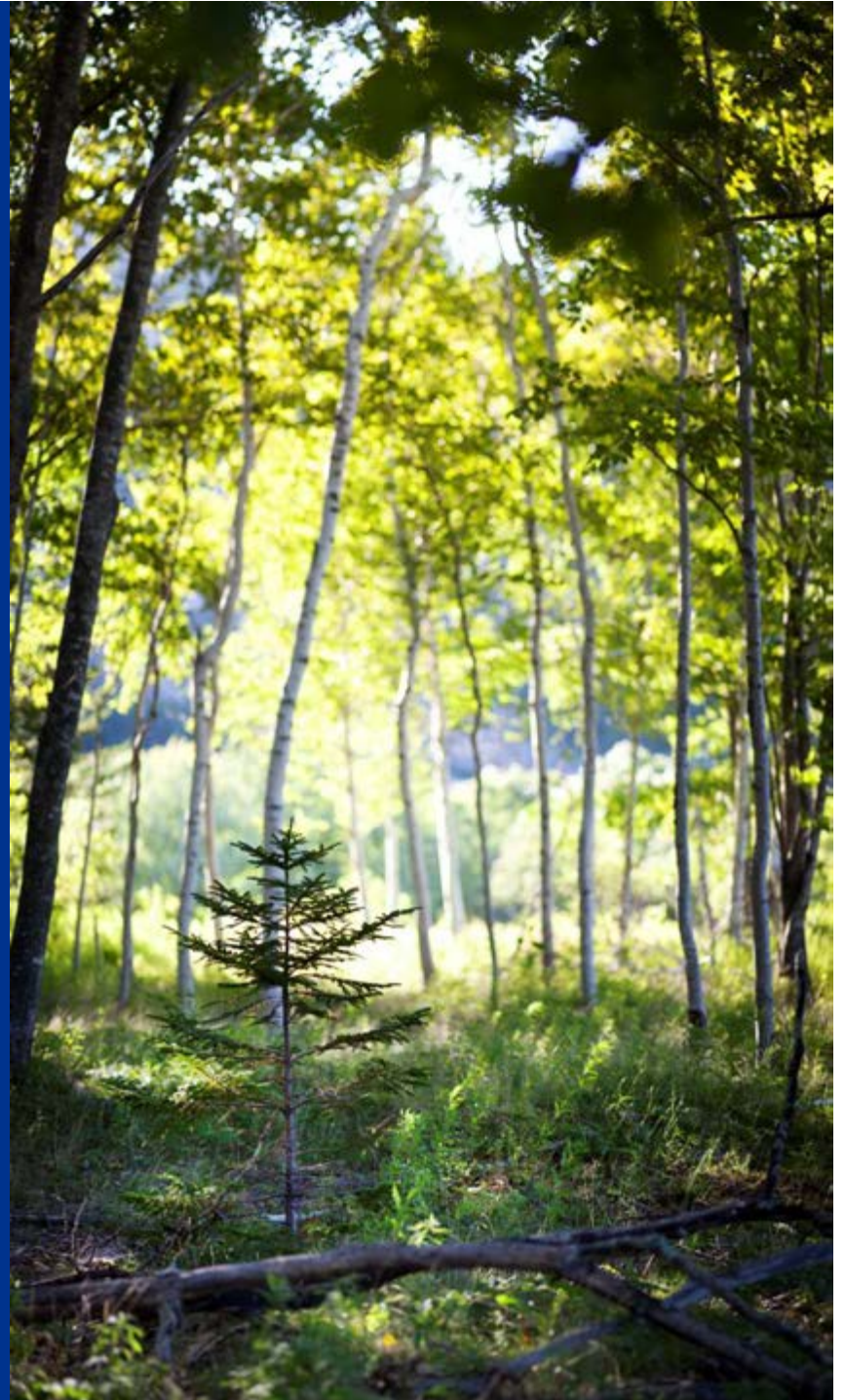
- The Canadian Centre of Community Resilience emphasizes the importance of community resilience in the face of challenging events. A resilient community is one that takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change.
- The Wildfire had a significant impact on the community and on the RMWB as an organization. In an effort to build resilience, the RMWB is committed to 'building back better' with
 - a continued focus on residents' physical and mental wellbeing;
 - a renewed emphasis on the safety and accessibility of the surrounding forest;
 - and stimulation of economic growth and diversification.
- The RMWB has embraced the philosophy of resilience and is actively working to enhance community health and safety through collaboration, commitment, and leadership.



Questions



Thank
you!





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