

Massachusetts sends wildland firefighters to help battle Quebec blazes

“Governor Maura Healey, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Rebecca Tepper, and officials from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) joined together to send off 11 state wildland firefighters to Quebec, Canada to help battle some of the more than 124 wildfires that have burned since the beginning of June.

“Over the last several years we have seen the impacts of the climate crisis here at home and around the world, in the forms of extreme weather and increasingly severe wildfires that continue to ravage our forests,” said Governor Maura Healey. “We are proud of these 11 Massachusetts wildland firefighters who are heading up to assist our Canadian partners in battling these intense wildfires.”



Mass.gov photo.

“We feel the effects of the climate crisis every day from the

extreme heat to droughts to the smoke polluting our air,” said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. “We appreciate the men and women from Massachusetts that will join the team fighting wildfires in Quebec and making our environment safer for all of us.”

“Firefighters are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, risking their lives to save others,” said Energy & Environmental Affairs Secretary Tepper. “I was grateful for the opportunity to thank them directly this morning and we will keep them in our thoughts as we forge ahead to a clean energy future. The clean energy transition is about people, and we see that today.”

“DCR is committed to doing everything we can to protecting our natural lands for generations to come and today’s deployment of these 11 DCR firefighters to help our friends and partners in Quebec is part of that commitment,” said DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo. “These are extremely well-trained and dedicated firefighters whose skills are much needed, and whose help, we know is enormously appreciated.”

The officials gathered this morning to send off the firefighter crew at DCR’s Bureau of Forestry and Fire Control headquarters in Carlisle.

The deployment is in response to a request DCR received last week from the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Commission and the Northeastern Interagency Coordination Center at the White Mountain National Forest in Campden, NH. The firefighters will travel to La Touque, where they will be assigned to one of many ongoing fire incidents throughout the province. The crew, which is also referred to as a “Wildfire Suppression Module,” will engage in direct fire suppression, working on the fire line for about 14 days – building fire breaks, securing fire perimeters, containing fires, and protecting structures.

Rising temperatures, drier conditions due to years long

droughts, and a lack of rain and snowfall, all caused by climate change, are fueling increased fire activity, making fire season last longer and its effects more severe. These conditions have made wildfires over the last few years more extreme and active than in the past. Climate change is also affecting wildlife in forested areas including an increase in insect activity which affects tree mortality and can create more fuel for fires to feed off. So far this year in Massachusetts, over 820 wildfires have burned 1,500 acres.

The Quebec situation is just the latest in an ongoing wildfire issue across Canada this year, including British Columbia, Alberta, and most recently Nova Scotia, and has resulted in major smoke impacts across the northeastern United States. The Northeast Forest Fire Protection Commission is a compact comprised of the six New England states, New York and four eastern Canadian provinces, including Quebec. Massachusetts is one of the original members of the compact, which was formed in 1949 to provide interstate and international wildland fire mutual aid assistance.

Since 1985, partnering with the U.S. Forest Service and the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Commission, DCR's Bureau of Forest Fire Control has sent crews to fight fires in areas of the western and Rocky Mountain states, as well as Alaska, Florida, Virginia and Quebec.

All firefighters are federally certified, having passed a 40-hour federal wildland firefighting class and physical fitness test.

The responding DCR firefighters are as follows:

- Benjamin Jennell of West Newbury
- Robert Armstrong of Conway
- George Kleczka of Plainville
- James Kontoules of Salem
- Eryn Donohoe of Sagamore Beach

- Charles Uchendu of Oak Bluffs
- Jacob O'Donnell of Millis
- Anders Anderson of Carver
- Derick Valovcin of Holliston
- Tyler Desautels of Milbury
- Alex Desrochers of Plymouth"-Mass.gov.