

**Statement from Mayor Mike Savage on wildfires**  
**Halifax Regional Council meeting**  
**Tuesday, June 6, 2023**

I want to take a moment to share a few thoughts about the wildfire crisis that has unfolded in our community, particularly the areas of Tantallon and Hammonds Plains.

My first call came from our CAO Sunday afternoon – Halifax Fire and Emergency and Natural Resources were responding to a wildfire perilously close to a residential community.

We all know what followed.

With the heat, the lack of our usual May rainfall, and a stiff breeze, it grew exponentially leading to the worst wildfire and largest evacuation our municipality has likely ever experienced.

The fire has devastated neighbourhoods, destroying 151 homes, damaging others, and forcing widescale evacuations impacting more than 16,000 people. While the majority have been able to return home, many are still waiting to see their homes or what remains of them.

We have moved from the immediate fire response to recovery efforts – which represents its own massive challenge.

We remain committed to the work ahead, to working with the communities that are impacted, to addressing safety and to helping people regain what was lost.

I want to recognize the efforts I saw last week and those that continue.

First, the firefighters – our own career and volunteer, Natural Resources, DND, and all the other municipal fire departments that rushed into a five-alarm fire.

For many, even among long-serving firefighters, these were some of the most harrowing conditions you had ever experienced and we cannot thank you enough for your courage and professionalism, along with Police and RCMP.

I thank Chief Stuebing, I thank the reassuring, knowledgeable voice of Dave Meldrum and the frank, competent voice of Roy Hollett, and everyone else in the fire department

and the police and RCMP who did amazing work.

Behind that frontline, was one heck of a team, working under municipal and provincial Emergency Management.

I cannot begin to count the hours put in at our Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), led by the indomitable Erica Fleck. Our CAO Cathie O'Toole demonstrated an incredible ability to act decisively under intense pressure. I want to thank the entire HRM team, from those I spent the week with at the EOC to those who were doing other things to assist.

To be clear, there are so many deserving of gratitude, many of them unsung including our Animal Services team who joined with community volunteers to rescue pets and reunite them with their anxious families.

...Or our 311 operators who worked long hours to help answer the queries of desperate and frightened residents and the emergency dispatcher sending out more and more help...

... The staff who set up comfort centres and an evacuation centre to offer help and provide information to the displaced.

...The Halifax Transit operators who drove through the evacuated zone with those who have lost their homes.

I want to acknowledge the incredible cooperation between our EMO and that of the province, dealing at the same time with monstrous wildfires still in effect in Barrington and Shelburne.

I also want to thank the media, a free and open media, getting word out and giving people the information that they need.

I want to thank officials from other orders of government, from Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Bill Blair and others, Premier Houston and so many members of his cabinet, as well as many conversations with those who directly represent the heavily impacted communities.

Our own Councillor Pam Lovelace, as well as MLA Ben Jessome, MP Lena Diab who came to the EOC, and Iain Rankin who called many times.

All showed the care and concern we expect of them; all want to do their part to make things better.

So much work lies ahead that I know it will challenge our time and our resources. But I want people to know that it will not diminish our resolve.

I want to encourage everyone to come out Friday for the terrific line-up at the benefit concert at the Scotiabank Centre and to support the wildfire funds established by the United Way Halifax and the Canadian Red Cross.

And finally, to the people of this community, to the people of HRM: thank you for your response, compassion, and patience.

Wildfires, like hurricanes and volatile winter weather, are reflections of climate change. The earth is changing, and it will demand more from all of us.

Thank you.