

Ashes to Action: A Call for Post-Wildfire Restoration in Canada

By Rob Keen

May 2025 is just over, and wildfires have already burned over 283,618 hectares of land across Canada. By mid-May 2025, around 100 wildfires were active, primarily in Manitoba and Ontario, two major fires in Manitoba and Saskatchewan alone accounted for over half of the area burned by early May. In 2023 and 2024, wildfires destroyed over 22.3 million hectares—nearly 7% of our forested land in two years. Now is the critical moment to initiate restoration efforts that can rejuvenate both our environment and economy.

The importance of forest restoration cannot be overstated. The Canadian Tree Nursery Association-Association Canadienne des Pépinières Forestières (CTNA-ACPF) calculates that restoring just 15% of the land lost in the recent (2023 and 2024) wildfires would require over 5.3 billion seedlings. This restoration effort could inject through the nursery sector alone, \$1.87 billion into the economy, boost GDP by \$3.91 billion, and create nearly 31,000 jobs.

A key component of the CTNA-ACPF *Four Step Plan for Recovery* is the establishment of a National Forest Restoration Task Team. This Team would bring together experts from the forest restoration supply chain for a coordinated, regionally responsive recovery effort. It will collaborate with provincial, territorial, and indigenous partners to coordinate federal and provincial support focused on:

- Rapid identification of priority reforestation areas for climate resilience.
- Coordination of restoration logistics including assessments, seed collection, planting and monitoring.
- Engage latest restoration science best practices, factoring in projected future fire and climate conditions.
- Further fostering collaboration among Indigenous communities, local stakeholders, and industry partners.

This leadership would harmonize provincial and territorial efforts, optimizing resource use for maximum impact and making a positive economic contribution.

The Economic Value of Canada's Tree Nursery Sector report reveals that Canada's tree nursery sector generates \$256.3 million in annual revenue, contributes \$535.4 million to the gross domestic product (GDP), and supports 4,378 full-time equivalent jobs in predominantly rural communities nationwide. As the nation grapples with the implications of increased wildfires and other natural disasters significantly impacting

our forests, these figures highlight the critical role that tree nurseries play in forest restoration efforts, ecological sustainability, and rural economic resilience.

Yes, the recent wildfires underscore the urgent need for unified commitment from federal and provincial leaders for forest restoration in Canada. A National Forest Restoration Task Team is vital. Immediate actions can help restore lost forests, address job opportunities to counter the recent tariff crisis and impacts to the forestry sector and lay the groundwork for a sustainable future.

The Canadian tree nursery sector is prepared to lead this restoration initiative. It is now up to federal, provincial and territorial decisionmakers to act decisively, by enhancing their commitments to forest restoration. Let's transform ashes into action and plant the seedlings for a revitalized future, ensuring Canada's economy and natural heritage continues to thrive for generations to come.

Rob Keen, RPF, is the Executive Director of the Canadian Tree Nursery Association– Association Canadienne des Pépinières Forestières (CTNA- ACPF), representing the 60+ member growers of over 95% of Canada's tree seedling production. Based in Huntsville, Ontario, he has 40+ years of experience in sustainable forestry, tree planting, and environmental stewardship. Formerly CEO of Forests Ontario, he helped plant over 43 million trees nationwide. <https://ctna-acpf.ca/our-mandate>.

-30-

For further information go to <https://ctna-acpf.ca> to schedule interviews with Rob Keen, Contact: Don Huff at huffd@ecostrategy.ca or 416-805-7720

About Canadian Tree Nursery Association-Association Canadienne des Pépinières Forestières: The CTNA-ACPF advocates on behalf of 60 tree nurseries ([CTNA-ACPF Membership](#)) from coast to coast to coast. Formed in 2023, the CTNA-ACPF is the only national voice representing tree nurseries in Canada. Our members grow more than 95% of the nation's forest restoration tree seedlings.