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[00:00:23] **Speaker 1** Smoke from Canadian wildfires is a regular feature these days in Wisconsin. According to current maps, there are seven hundred active wildfires in Canada, most of them categorized as out of control. What's the risk of wildfires or forest fires in Wisconsin? And could cuts in federal funding of the U.S. Forest Service affect forest management in Wisconsin We're joined now by James Barnier, Forest Fire Protection Section Chief for the Division of Forestry, and thanks very much for being here. Thank you. So I know that the Wisconsin DNR also has these fire management dashboards online. How has this year compared historically for wildfires in Wisconsin?

[00:01:08] **Speaker 2** This year was fairly unique. It was one of our more uncommon types of events. We've had, as you might remember, a drier than normal winter. We saw a significant number of fires in January and February, which we traditionally don't see. So those fires cause a lot of work on our staff to be prepared, be ready, typically when we're trying to get ready for our typical spring season, which is March, April, and May. And so that really took a toll on our staff. Overall from that working those two months earlier. Traditionally we see snow fall during that time frame.

[00:01:45] **Speaker 1** So what are conditions like right now for fires in Wisconsin?

[00:01:49] **Speaker 2** Well, to be honest, we're just starting to get back into some droughtier conditions. We're starting to staff up again and just prepare for fires for the summer months.

[00:01:58] **Speaker 1** When a fire breaks out, what kind of fuels its spread?

[00:02:03] **Speaker 2** Well, most of our fires are caused by people, and typically in the state of Wisconsin, most of our fire are wind driven, usually with low RH and higher temperatures, but mostly with wind and low RHs is what we see drives most of the fires, and usually that light fuels, that grassier type fuels that would spread really fast, and then once that gets ignited the fire gets a lot bigger, there's called ladder fuels, those ladder fuels get into the tops of the trees and then when you see those really significant type of crown fires.

[00:02:33] **Speaker 1** So you have told us that it is not likely that Wisconsin would ever see fires like those in Canada. Why not?

[00:02:42] **Speaker 2** Well, I wouldn't say we wouldn't see types of fires of that magnitude of 250,000 acres. We probably wouldn't that size of fires. But we do see a lot of significant, what I would say catastrophic for the state of Wisconsin. Anything between, you know, 3,000 to, you now, 15,000 acres, those types of fire are common, you known, every so often in the state of Wisconsin and have significant impacts across the state.

[00:03:08] **Speaker 1** So you've been with the DNR for 30 years. When you get that call that there's that kind of fire going, what goes through your head?

[00:03:17] **Speaker 2** Well, I think our preparedness of our staff on the ground, just making sure they have all the tools and resources that they need, and my role predominantly is to oversee, quote unquote, the command center down in Madison here, and to ensure that they can get all the resources they need. And sometimes that's working with our partners, whether it's Minnesota, Michigan, Ontario, Manitoba, to help us on our fires.

[00:03:39] **Speaker 1** Speaking of which, a number of DNR firefighters have been in Canada. Tell me about that.

[00:03:47] **Speaker 2** Yeah, just like I just suggested that we use their resources, they're asking for our resources now. So we've sent up 20 people to both Ontario and Manitoba. And during that time frame, they're actually fighting fires and working within that organization on their IMT's incident management teams to help facilitate that. So doing so, it is a significant event.

[00:04:09] **Speaker 1** How much forest land does Wisconsin have and who's responsible for its management, fire prevention, and firefighting?

[00:04:18] **Speaker 2** Just in general, there's about 57% of the forest lands is privately owned and about another 10% industry owned and the rest is government entities. And so we provide, Wisconsin DNR provides support with those landowners through sound forest management practices to provide some management plans for them or through industry, working through industry foresters and ensuring that we have a good solid. Healthy forests to help limit those large-scale typefires.

[00:04:48] **Speaker 1** So we know that state officials have concern about federal cuts to states from the U.S. Forest Service. And Wisconsin, I understand, receives about $2 million of those federal funds. Governor Evers said that cutting that would be devastating to state operations and cause, you know, lacking capacity for wildfire preparedness and suppression. What role do the feds play in wildlife or wildfire management.

[00:05:20] **Speaker 2** They provide us a lot of funding sources. So yes, roughly a little over $2 million to support perspectives associated with wildfire preparedness. And where would that money go? Well, we work heavily with our partners. Local fire departments are one of our key components within the state of Wisconsin. And we provide grants to those to help facilitate responses to those fires. Also, for our needs, for training responsibilities, our tools, our resources. And even some of our funding of our positions. We currently, through some of those federal dollars, we fund seven FTE worth of positions.

[00:05:59] **Speaker 1** So we'll see what happens with that funding. But James Barnier, thanks very much for joining us. To be a firefighter in that kind of realm is a lot.

[00:06:23] **Speaker 2** Am I done then?

[00:06:24] **Speaker 1** Okay. Can you leave immediately? That's what I wanted. Watch out. You're...