



# WESTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

## The Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program

Media Release

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### **New \$8M Prescribed Fire Training Program Puts Good Fire Back on the Land**

*The Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program strengthens national capacity for the safe, effective use of prescribed fire in support of biodiversity, ecological, and community resilience.*

**Canada, February 25, 2026 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** – From an early age, we are taught to fear fire without understanding the essential role it plays in supporting ecological resilience. The new \$8M Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program (CPFTP), co-developed by the University of British Columbia’s Okanagan Campus (UBCO), and the Weston Family Foundation, will address a critical gap in Canada’s ability to use and scale prescribed fire as a land management and ecological restoration tool.

Our diverse ecosystems have evolved over thousands of years to rely on fire to support biodiversity, ecological health and resilience. Over time, changes to land management practices, including the widespread suppression and exclusion of fire, have left these ecosystems ‘out of balance’. As vegetation builds up, it acts like kindling, allowing fires to become more intense and harder to control, contributing to increasingly devastating and severe wildfires across Canada.

Prescribed fire is a safe, planned, and proven land management tool used to enhance the health of our ecosystems, support biodiversity and reduce wildfire severity and risk. Despite its demonstrated benefits, the value of prescribed fire is not widely recognized or understood. As a result, it is vastly underused in Canada and is widely constrained by the limited availability of training, mentorship, and opportunities to gain operational experience in the field. “The compounding effects of climate change and extreme wildfire events call for more proactive, planned and land-driven management tools to support healthy, wildfire resilient landscapes,” said Garfield Mitchell, Chair of the Weston Family Foundation. “This program directly addresses the skills and training gap that has been long overlooked to strengthen our capacity for widespread and responsible use of prescribed fire in Canada.”

CPFTP will educate and train practitioners across Canada through regional hubs, tailoring prescribed fire training to meet the needs of Canada’s diverse and varied landscapes, and delivering significant community safety and ecological benefits nationwide. There are five regional hubs: western, northern, central, eastern and Atlantic Canada, these regional hubs will ensure approaches reflect local ecosystems, governance structures, and operational realities.

The program further emphasizes cross-disciplinary collaboration, and evidence-informed practice, while respecting and supporting Indigenous-led fire stewardship and cultural fire practices. “Canada’s ability to expand the use of prescribed fire has been constrained by a lack of coordinated training and clear pathways to operational experience,” said Dr. Mathieu Bourbonnais, Assistant Professor, Irving K. Barber Faculty of Science at UBC Okanagan Director of the Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program. “This program provides the leadership and structure needed to establish national standards, deliver regionally grounded training, and build the capacity required to apply prescribed fire safely, responsibly, and at scale.”

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As the frequency and severity of wildfires increase, the safe and responsible use of prescribed fire can counter adverse effects on communities and the environment by reducing risk and keeping our landscapes healthy and resilient.

Members of the media are invited to attend one of two virtual media availabilities on Wednesday, February 25 to learn more about the Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program. Each one-hour session will feature a short, moderated discussion between Nathan Skolski, Director of Public Affairs, UBC Okanagan (UBCO), and Dr. Mathieu Bourbonnais, Assistant Professor, Irving K. Barber Faculty of Science at UBCO and Director of the CPFTP, before Dr. Bourbonnais takes questions from the media.

CPFTP Virtual Media Availabilities:

- Wednesday, February 25 from 11 a.m.–12:00 p.m. PST (English)

Please register using this link: [Webinar Registration - Zoom \(English\)](#).

- Wednesday, February 25 from 9:30–10:30 a.m. PST (French)

Please register using this link: [Webinar Registration - Zoom \(French\)](#).

For more information about CPFTP, and to stay informed, please visit [rxfire.ca](http://rxfire.ca)

#### **ABOUT THE CANADIAN PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING PROGRAM:**

The Canadian Prescribed Fire Training Program (CPFTP), co-developed by the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus (UBCO) and the Weston Family Foundation, is a national training initiative designed to educate and train practitioners across Canada in the safe and effective use of prescribed fire. This first-of-its kind program addresses a critical gap in Canada's capacity for prescribed fire by supporting the development, coordination, and application of knowledge and practical experience needed to use fire as a land management and ecological restoration tool. By building a national pool of trained prescribed fire practitioners, CPFTP supports ecosystem stewardship, landscape resilience and community safety across Canada.

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**ABOUT THE WESTON FAMILY FOUNDATION:**

At the Weston Family Foundation (formerly The W. Garfield Weston Foundation), more than 60 years of philanthropy have taught us that there is a relationship between healthy landscapes and healthy people. That's why we champion world-class health research and innovation with the same passion that we support initiatives to protect and restore biodiversity on Canada's unique landscapes. Our spark, shepherd, scale approach to research ensures the best ideas have the best chance of success. We take a collaborative approach to philanthropy, working alongside forward-thinking partners to advance Canada and create lasting impacts. We aspire to do more than provide funding; we want to enable others to find transformational ways to improve the well-being of Canadians.

**ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S OKANAGAN CAMPUS:**

UBC's Okanagan campus is an innovative hub for research and learning founded in partnership with local Indigenous peoples, the Syilx Okanagan Nation, in whose traditional, ancestral and unceded territory the campus resides. The most established and influential global rankings consistently rank UBC in the top three per cent of universities in the world, and among the top three in Canada. Through interdisciplinary expertise and teaching in ecology, wildfire science, community resilience and Indigenous-led land stewardship, UBCO is nationally recognized for its leadership in wildfire research, leveraging its location in the fire-prone BC Interior to address an urgent climate and landscape management challenge. UBCO combines a globally recognized UBC education with a tight-knit and entrepreneurial community that welcomes students and faculty from around the world in British Columbia's stunning Okanagan Valley.

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