

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Chief Moore,

In the past 30 days, Ohio and the Midwest have been substantially affected by smoke from the Canadian wildfires. While the East Coast garnered most of the media attention in early June as smoke poured over the northern border, Ohio has been impacted as well. Now the Midwest faces the brunt of further out-of-control Canadian wildfires. The smoke from these fires travelled southwest into the Great Lakes basin and stagnated, leaving Ohioans breathing air that could harm their health.

On Wednesday June 28th, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was over 200 in Canton and Cleveland. In the rest of the state the AQI comfortably average in the 180s. An AQI of 151 to 200 is considered unhealthy by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and an AQI of 201 to 300 is considered very unhealthy. Ohioans are not alone either. According to the NBC News Weather Unit, there were 127 million people under air quality alerts across the United States on Wednesday. According to the EPA, the impacts of prolonged exposure to these levels of air quality will have both immediate and long-term consequences for population health.

As of Thursday June 29th, there were 502 total fires in Canada, with 253 determined to be out of control by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. This is only the beginning of fire season in Canada, which historically peaks in July and August. I am concerned that the smoke from Canada will become a regular environmental event this summer in Ohio, across the Midwest, and the United States.

As the primary government entities tasked with fighting wildfires in the United States, it would be valuable to get your perspective on the below set of questions. It is critical that we start thinking about these questions and others to prevent, to the extent possible, additional air quality issues in Ohio:

1. Please advise why these fires are particularly bad this year, even before the peak of fire season in Canada?
2. Are there forest management and firefighting practices in the United States that are presently not being deployed in Canada?
3. How much firefighting resource (personnel, equipment, etc.) sharing between the United States and Canada currently exists?
4. Do you believe that there are policy options for the Congress to undertake to ameliorate the impact of out-of-control fires, or to facilitate additional collaboration between your agencies and their Canadian counterparts?

Thank you in advance for a prompt response and your careful consideration on how to minimize the effects of the Canadian wildfires in Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD Vance', written over a horizontal line.

JD Vance
U.S. Senator